

FIFA 14 LEGO MARVEL MINECRAFT MASS EFFECT



Issue 99 June 2013

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XBOX 360

THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

GTA V

LATEST DETAILS
OF ROCKSTAR'S
AMAZING NEW
WORLD

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

CASTLEVANIA LORDS OF SHADOW 2

Xbox's best action game opens up

15

Future

Issue 99 June 2013

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INSIDE » BATMAN BEGINS » FLASHBACK RETURNS
» THE \$400,000 COD MATCH » MAKING A SCENE

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Some of the awards and nominations to date...



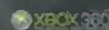
*"...bleak, challenging,
and shaping up to be one of
2013's best shooters"*



"It surpasses its predecessor on all counts"

VG24/7

*"Half-Life meets Fallout in
4A's oppressive sequel...
It could be 2013's smartest FPS"*



*"Metro: Last Light perfects the formula that
Valve introduced in Half-Life"*



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Issue 99 June 2013

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XBOX 360

THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

Welcome...

...to a spectacular sunset and a new dawn



There's finally a date: 21 May. That's when Microsoft will at long last debut the next Xbox and reveal just how the world of gaming is going to change this year. I'll be there for the event, and we'll be covering it live – head over to oxm.co.uk and join in, and look forward to a particularly special Issue 100 next month.

After eight years of Xbox 360, it's a real thrill to see what's next – but the better news is that the status quo is still remarkably healthy. We've got a slew of top-tier games coming out this year, emphatically for Xbox 360, which means however comely the next generation is, your current console will still be swinging away. Cover star *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2* is a still grander follow-up to one of the biggest surprises of this generation; *Grand Theft Auto V* delivers a world that's almost intimidatingly huge; the latest *FIFA* impresses as ever, and there's even a new *Batman* – albeit not from Rocksteady. All of which means that while all the excitement will be around the next Xbox, the Xbox 360 isn't out of the running just yet. Enjoy the issue.

Jon

Jon Hicks
OXM Jonty

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The team – and how they spent the month



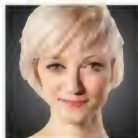
Editor
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Got his ticket for the Xbox reveal event in Seattle. Has vowed to come back laden with the most tasteless branded merchandise the company store offers.



Associate Editor
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Continued his fitness odyssey, as documented last month, and has now lost two stone. We celebrated by giving him a new job title.



Staff Writer
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Was welcomed to the mag by immediately being sent to sit in a warehouse full of *Call of Duty* players for three days. Encouragingly, didn't quit on the spot.



Deputy Editor
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T: @dringiblebill

Got promoted, in recognition of his tireless work online. It hasn't really registered, alas, because he doesn't recognise anybody below the level of Baronet.



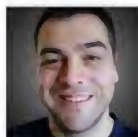
Production Editor
Jenny Meade
T: @JennyMeade

Used a combination of polite requests and implied threats to ensure we made a mag this month instead of just playing *Battleblock Theater*. A truly heroic achievement.



Writer
Tamoor Hussain
T: @tamoorh

Went to New York to see the *Dark Souls II* team. Somehow resisted urge to break down in tears and demand tips on how to beat Ornstein and Smough.



Writer
Richard Meade
T: @drinkingt

We drafted in a proper *FIFA* expert to look at this year's game. We don't understand half of what he said about it, but generally he seems pretty enthusiastic.



Writer
Craig Owens
T: @craig_owens

This month we tried getting the ex-Edge man to do a high five, only to be told an OXM high five is an Edge low three. We just shook hands instead.

How to use your interactive edition



Video



Gallery



Audio



Jump to

Tap the yellow buttons to stream video*, play audio, view galleries or navigate the magazine.

* Internet connection required for video streaming

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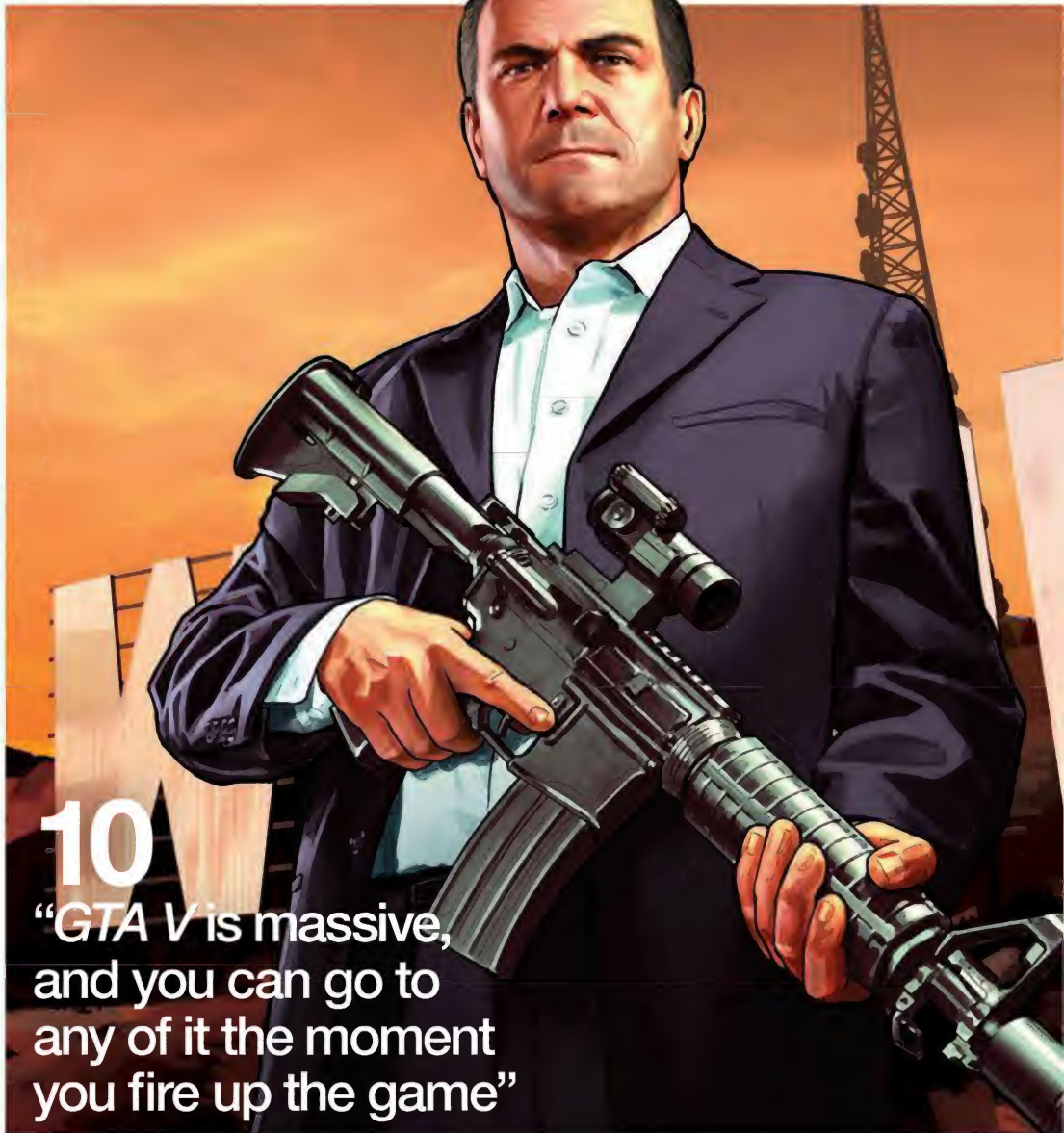
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26 Dracula has a bad hair day.



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“*GTA V* is massive, and you can go to any of it the moment you fire up the game”



78 Is the first Xbox MMO a no-go?



14 *Arkham Origins* takes us right back.



52 What's new in *FIFA 14*? We take a first look.



56 *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes* charms the spandex off us.



34 Get inside the world of eSports.



70 Prefer DC to Marvel? Well that's just super.

Dashboard

Expert opinion and comment

GTA V

Face to face with the monster that Rockstar is incubating. Will it blow us away, or blow off?

Heroes & Zeroes

Patrick Bach talks *Battlefield 4*, while our heroes and zeroes shamelessly cavort to his left.

Month in Numbers

Dark Souls II, easy? Ha! Producer Yui Tanimura reveals why the sequel will be just as gruelling as its predecessor.

First Look

Batman: Arkham Origins isn't being made by Rocksteady. Could that break the spell of excellence?

Number Cruncher

Want to know how many days *BattleBlock Theater* took to make? Jump into the fact barrel.

Lucas Departs

Killed by Disney, we look over LucasArts' chequered pantheon.

Hot Topic

Who wants realism? Precisely 50% of the two people on this page, is who.

Most Wanted

The next Xbox is being announced when, you say? Here's everything we know so far.

Input

Post opinion on your games, your friends and your magazine

Letters

Getting a letter in our pages means you're a published author, and is a great way to woo a prospective lover.

Features

The best writers in the industry explore the wider world of Xbox 360

Castle Crashers

MercurySteam is drawing its *Castlevania* trilogy to a close: we visit its studio to check it out.

Professional Killers

Get paid to play games? It's simple – you just have to work really hard.

Indie Incorporated

Microsoft has bought Press Play – the team say why that's just fine with them.

Goodnight Shepard

A five-way question explosion with the people who made *Mass Effect*.

Ender Game

Minecraft finally gets dragons, and a new gravel texture. Mmm. Gravelly.

Previews

Every detail available on the most-wanted Xbox 360 games

FIFA 14

LEGO Marvel Super Heroes

Deadfall Adventures

MotoGP 13

Metal Gear Solid V:

The Phantom Pain

The Evil Within

Flashback

Cloudberry Kingdom

Reviews

The ultimate buyers' guide – the best new Xbox 360 games reviewed!

Injustice: Gods Among Us

Army of Two: The Devil's Cartel

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14

Defiance

Dead Island Riptide

Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen

Giana Sisters: Twisted Dreams

The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct

Terraria

BattleBlock Theater

Far Cry 3 Blood Dragon

Monaco

Also Released

The Full 360

Customise and expand your Xbox 360 gaming with tips, content and great ideas!

Now playing: Injustice

Consult with our wall of pro-tips.

DLC reviews

Stab fresh life into *Dishonored*.

OXM investigates

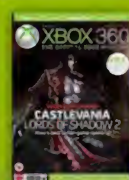
Cutscenes: not why, but how?

Online review

Back to *Judgment*'s new modes.

Quiz

How's your stealthing? Answer our questions to find out...



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HALO 4 FORWARD UNTO DAWN

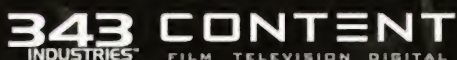


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Hello Hollywood

Our first close look at *GTA V* reveals a whole new world of detail

When Rockstar sets out to prove the new *GTA* is "open from the start", it doesn't mess around: our first view starts as we plummet from a plane, followed by a leisurely parachute tour of the rolling countryside, with a military base and the skyscrapers of Los Santos just visible in the distance. It's *huge*, and you can go to any of it from the moment you fire up the game.

Our tour includes an authentically sleazy Hollywood approximation, nondescript office district and rolling countryside, and each is densely populated. While the tech is recognisably the same as *GTA IV* and *Red Dead*, streets get far more pedestrians and countryside teems with life.

The oceans are similarly busy. Newly accessible via scuba gear found in specific boats, they're filled with fish – including easily-irritated sharks – and other divers, flitting between wreckages on the seabed. Given the scale of the thing, it's just as well that you can flip between each of the three main characters, via a *Driver: San Francisco*-style zoom out to satellite view and back. Such

Quantum Leap-style body-hopping should be a big time-saver when getting around (if you want to do it the old way, taxis will return – although Rockstar's uncertain about public transport).

Each of the three crims – Michael the bored ex-bank robber, Trevor the lunatic pilot, and Franklin the young up-and-comer – comes with their own stats for things like stealth, shooting, driving and lung capacity, which are boosted through use. Each also has a special skill: Michael gets bullet-time, Franklin gets a racing version of bullet time, and Trevor gets boosted melee skills.

The three-way character split gives a choose-your-own adventure angle: Trevor suggests the lunacy of *Gay Tony*, Michael's the more serious *GTA IV* man, and Franklin is closer to *San Andreas*' CJ. The narrative forces you to play

certain characters at specific times, but mostly it's up to you: a quick run through of a small heist flicked between Trevor's sniping and Michael and Franklin on the ground.

The job itself offered a modicum of customisation – previous missions involved placing the getaway car and sourcing the disguises – which also features in the game's series of signature heists. We haven't seen these yet, but they're comparable to *GTA IV*'s *Heat*-esque Three Leaf Clover. Exciting stuff: we'll have more next month.

"The countryside, ocean and city all teem with life"



NEILL BLOMKAMP STILL FANCIES A HALO MOVIE

Speaking to IGN, the *District 9* director said that he's still interested in making a *Halo* film happen, but only on his terms. "I still really love the world and the universe and the mythology of *Halo*," he said. "If I was given control, I would really like to do that film."

LA NOIRE DEV DOWNS TOOLS

Where of the *Orient*, the next game from the team that created *LA Noire*, is reportedly on hold after failing to find a publisher. Development work on the 1930s adventure has been halted by owner KMM, which bought up the remains of the bankrupted Team Bondi.



Will the "great untold story" ever be told?



Someone likes being the centre of attention.



Boosting your tree burning stats, Franklin?



GTA's bread and butter. Now with more butter.



Yes, it looks lovely. Can we play it, please?



Something parachutey is missing here.



As crime-solving dogs say: SCUBA do be cool.

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Patrick Bach on why *Battlefield 4* won't be better with Kinect.



Why 'accessible' and 'easy' are far from the same.

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14 FIRST LOOK

The third game in the *Arkham* series is a prequel – and it's not being made by the same people. Drama?

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The page that will, eventually, give birth to the word "newsmerical".



Names aren't important when you're generic.

18 LUCAS DEPARTS

An homage to the team that bought us some stellar and terrible moments.

20 HOT TOPIC

Should we doggedly pursue photorealism in our games?



21 May can't come soon enough.

21 MOST WANTED

What's your most wanted? The next Xbox, of course. Here's everything we know about it so far.

HERO



BLACK OPS JAPANESE

The new maps contain such gems as "10% off if the volcano erupts".

2.3M DARK SOULS SALES

Good news – a great game has sold as much as it deserved.



VR GRANNIES

Pensioners using Oculus Rift prove reality is history.

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

Thanks, Netflix – you've justified six quid a month for the rest of our lives.



XCOM SHOOTER

We hope you fare better as *The Bureau*.

CASTLE OF ILLUSION HD

Is it just us? Wasn't this really boring? Excited about *Duck Tales*, though.



NO MORE SKYRIM DLC

No more *Skyrim*? Well, okay. Let's have *TES6*, then. Come on, chop chop.

SUNFLOWERS

Screw you guys, you big-faced idiots. Who died and made you so oily?



ZERO



RED FACTION MAY RISE AGAIN

The last remnants of THQ have been auctioned off. Gearbox bagged PC classic *Homeworld* for \$6.55 million, whilst relative unknown Nordic Games got nearly everything else including *Darksiders*, *Red Faction* and *Full Spectrum Warrior* – all for a cool \$4.9 million. New instalments are promised.

Apparently Nordic knows *Armageddon* was rubbish.

STRAIGHT SHOOTING



Battlefield 4: No Gimmicks

Patrick Bach on Kinect, single-player and growing up

When a box says "Better With Kinect", it's all-too-often truer to say "Just As Good Without Kinect". That's probably why *Battlefield 4* producer Patrick Bach is dismissing motion control for *Battlefield 4*. "We're not interested in things that don't make the game better," he said. And that's in defiance of cash opportunities too. "There are a lot of gimmicks – people throwing money at us – to implement support for quirky controls. But there's no point unless it adds value to the player."

But it's not the Kinect slam that it's been spun into in some headlines. Bach qualifies his previous spiel with "we're extremely open to innovation", like anyone would say the opposite, and goes on to talk about touch controls. "Touch screens used to be a gimmick, until iPhone came out and used it right. It added to the experience, and now everyone is doing it." The implication? That no-one's got motion control right, yet. Ouch.

In the interview with *Edge* magazine, Bach covered a few other topics, as well. Why DICE revealed single-player, instead of

BF's kingslaying multiplayer: "It let us show off a lot of different aspects of the game. You can extrapolate a lot of features from that." And there was some fairly vague talk about how the campaign will evolve: "It's important to create a character you care about, where you feel involved in their actions. We want to move elements of multiplayer into single-player. When you're playing multiplayer, you care about the guys in your squad. They're often your friends, you help them, they help you, and they have their own mindset. Our single-player has to mimic that feeling."

Having won us over with multiplayer, the 17-minute "Fishing In Baku" video was designed to show redoubled commitment to a decent campaign. Creating a connection with your squad is everything to Bach, even if that connection's built by hacking off your mate's leg. "One thing we're most happy with is that people pick up on the characters. They remember the names. You could argue that it's just a shooter, so who cares? For us, it's important to grow up a bit."



All will be revealed on 11 June, apparently.

METAL GEAR 5 HOLLYWOOD INTRIGUE

A new YouTube account uploads a video of a bandaged face miming along to a speech synth. The person claims to be a Hollywood actor starring in *MGS5*. Surely it's a fan hoax, right? Well yes... but there's just enough self-importance that it could actually be official Kojima Studios publicity.



Dark Souls II: still tough as nails

Producer promises 'accessible' doesn't mean 'easy'

Praise the sun, *Dark Souls* lovers! Developer From Software has no intention of making the sequel any easier. Yui Tanimura, producer of *Dark Souls II*, said as much at a recent Namco Bandai showcase.

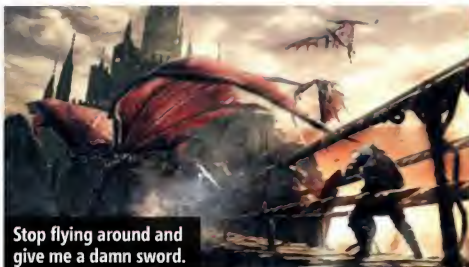
When taken to task on earlier comments that the sequel would be "more accessible", Tanimura said that it was all a misunderstanding. "A lot of fans took the word 'accessible' and translated it to 'it will be easier,'" he explained. "We apologise for casually using the word. There's no intent for us to make the game any easier."

What the developer did mean is that *Dark Souls II* will be a much leaner experience. From Software plans to strip away fatty bits like backtracking, and make some systems less obtuse. The end product will be the satisfying essence of *Dark Souls* gameplay in all its undiluted glory.

Of course, From Software isn't just recklessly hacking away at *Dark Souls II*, instead it's treating the sequel like a bonsai tree and lovingly pruning it. "We will make sure that we don't just cut away," promised Tanimura. "We'll figure out what's critical to the essence, what needs to remain, and what we can cut away to deliver a pure experience."

You can rest assured that enemies will opportunistically murder you the moment you put a foot wrong, environments will be more hostile than ever and, thanks to the new server-based online infrastructure, fellow players will have all kinds of new ways to help/harm.

Best of all, Tanimura hinted at things carrying over from the first game – though he didn't go on to say exactly what those things would be. If you needed an excuse to indulge in a bit of *Dark Souls* masochism again, there it is.



Stop flying around and give me a damn sword.



Dying's bad enough. But dying under that?

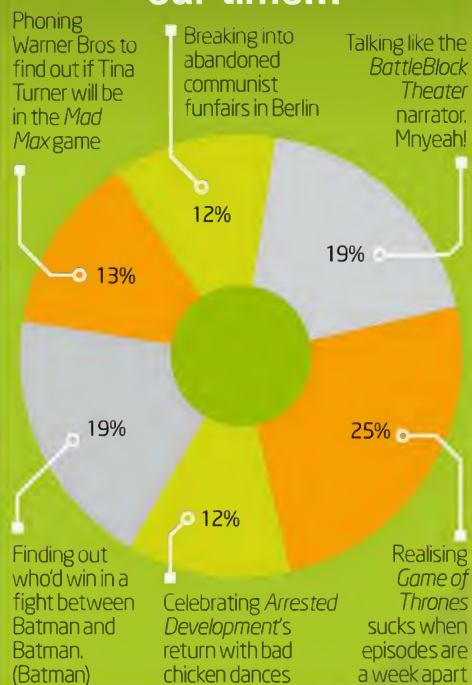
Month in Numbers

Team OXM's antics via the medium of infographics

Office References to... Our New Recruit, Aoife

- 5** Edwin Working out how to say it. Rhymes with Tifa from *FFVII*. Also, E for Elephant
- 13** Jonty Spending a worrying amount of time working out how to spell it
- 60** Log Glad he finally knows someone with the same vowel/consonant ratio as "queue"
- 130** Aoife Dealing with three English idiots talking about her name

How we've filled our time...



What's been on our Xbox 360

Castle Crashers
20% We went back to see our *BattleBlock*-related unlocks

Dust: An Elysian Tail
50% One man did this? What is he, 100ft-tall or something?

Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon
30% It's confusing but it's good. See our review on page 89



XCOM SHOOTER: NOW CALLED 'THE BUREAU'?

2K is finally dusting off the *XCOM*-branded tactical shooter it first revealed back in 2010 and stopped talking about in 2011. It's now a third-person affair being handled by *BioShock 2* dev 2K Marin, and word is that it's been renamed *The Bureau*. Full details next issue.



NOTCH: SECOND TO EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT

Time Magazine has listed the 100 most influential people in the world, and *Minecraft*'s own Markus "Notch" Persson came, erm, second. Look, we're not disputing he's important, but this whole list might be a more accurate measure of the power of online voting.



Batman: Arkham Origins

A young Batman meets a
new class of supervillain

Look where cuboid pigs will get you.



FANS WANT ORIGINAL GARRETT BACK

There were ripples of discontent when Sam Fisher's voice changed. And it's happening again for *Thief*. At the time of writing, 3,667 fans have demanded the return of Garrett's voice-so-far, Stephen Russell. Is this just a misplaced reflex against any change to a beloved series?



Demanding innovation, resisting change.



No Rocksteady, but the kicking remains.



Ever fall off a building in the pale moonlight?



Pliers – as terrifying as the man holding them.

FIRST LOOK

Did you want to know what happened after *Arkham City*? After Batman placed

Joker's corpse on Commissioner Gordon's car? How did ol' Bruce W deal with the death of his most romanticised foe? If those questions have been haunting you since you completed the game, then tough luck – *Arkham Origins* is a prequel. A fresher Batman, accustomed to fighting mobsters, muggers and bank robbers, is about to face many of his famous enemies for the first time.

There's another shock in store: *Origins* isn't being developed by Rocksteady. Development has moved away from North London, and into Warner Bros' Montreal studio. This is bound to be a worry for fans, and Warner is already trying to reassure people. For starters, Rocksteady has handed over its heavily customised version of the Unreal Engine and many of the assets, giving *Origins* the best hope of resembling its predecessors.

Although it's called *Arkham Origins*, this is before the takeover of the city by Dr Strange and Ra's al Ghul. We start the game in a wintery Gotham, on Christmas Eve. This undivided city will be bigger than the Arkham-ised segment that we were allowed to explore in the last game. Hopefully that extra size won't come at the expense of density – part of the pleasure of *Arkham City* was that it felt like you couldn't move without tripping over a gang incident or a Riddler puzzle.

Stroke of death

It might not be the overwhelming villainfest that *Arkham City* was – the first and only villain to be named at this stage is Deathstroke. Created as Deathstroke The Terminator, he's a one-eyed super-soldier and weapons expert, who took part in US military experiments. He has a complicated home life – he got his son's throat slit, and his wife shot out his right eyeball, which is frankly *Coronation Street* levels of drama. He was invented to be a disillusioned mercenary to battle the

Teen Titans, but he's proved so popular as to end up as a more complicated anti-hero, frequently fighting alongside them when a bigger threat came along.

Creative director Eric Holmes actually discovered *Batman* games before coming across his comic book origins – it was *The Caped Crusader* on Commodore 64 that led him to explore the graphic novels of the time, like Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* – the story that wiped out Batgirl, and created Oracle in her place.

The *Arkham* series has become a model for how to do franchised action adventure right, thanks entirely to Rocksteady's vision and skills. Warner Bros Montreal has got some comically over-sized clown shoes to fill. Let's hope it doesn't leave us disappointed.

"Batman's about to face his famous foes for the first time"

JADE EMPIRE SHOULD'VE BEEN A LAUNCH TITLE

Departed BioWare founder Greg Zeschuk has said that well-regarded Xbox title *Jade Empire* should have been a launch title for Xbox 360. "I think making *Jade Empire* a 360 launch title would have been massive," he said. "It would've been great to put it off a bit and polish the game a bit more."



Wolverine claws make anything awesome.

KING'S QUEST REBOOT LOOKING LESS LIKELY

Telltale has shelved plans to remake classic '80s adventure *King's Quest*. Series creator Roberta Williams had been lined up, but the rights have reverted to Activision, which also owns the rest of the Sierra/Vivendi back catalogue. It's apparently considering a reboot of its own.

STAT ATTACK

Number cruncher

The world of gaming reproduced in statistical form

127,944

Terraria's first-week sales, beating *Minecraft's* 81,205 in the same time period.



Number of staff laid off from LucasArts.

150



How many months we've had to wait for *Persona 4 Arena* to be localised.

123

Number of Xbox 360 exclusives so far.



1,972

Days between *Castle Crashers* and *The Behemoth's* latest release, *BattleBlock Theatre*



million sales of *Minecraft* to date, meaning *Terraria* has some catching up to do.

64%

of UK BioShock Infinite sales were on Xbox 360.

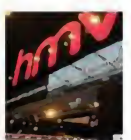


23,000

Total number of people who attended the Game Developers Conference this year.

141

HMV stores saved from administration by owner Hilco.



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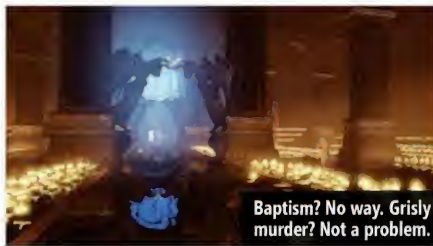
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BAPTISM BLASPHEMY LEADS TO REFUND

Breen Malmberg had a moral problem with *BioShock Infinite*. As a Christian, he felt that DeWitt undergoing a non-optional baptism was blasphemous. He asked Valve for a refund and, perhaps smelling potential bad PR from the Christian Right, they furnished him with one.



PRETEND MAN AXES REAL XBOX

YouTube star Boogie2988's satirical alter-ego, Francis, was so outraged with the persistent "always online" rumours of the next Xbox that he smashed an Xbox with an axe. It was an immediate hit amongst many people who didn't realise Francis isn't real.

LUCAS DEPARTS

The golden age developer-publisher becomes a licencing rubberstamp

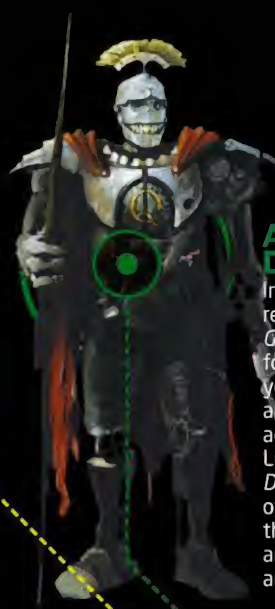
MANIAC MANSION

Maniac Mansion kick-started the SCUMM engine, which became LucasArts' standard for making adventure games. Six years later, there was a sequel - *Day of the Tentacle*. If you want to play the old games on your PC, you can download a SCUMM emulator.



GRIM FANDANGO

No exaggeration - this is some of the best character design and world-building around. Manny's boss is stealing the tickets to Aztec Ninth Heaven and selling them to mobsters. He decides to stop it, leading him into some genuinely clever, frequently annoying puzzles.



ARMED AND DANGEROUS

In 2000, Planet Moon released the excellent *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* for Interplay. Three years later, it made another comedy adventure for LucasArts. *Armed and Dangerous* featured one of our favourite guns - the Land Shark Gun - and kept the tone light and difficulty tough.

YEAR 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997



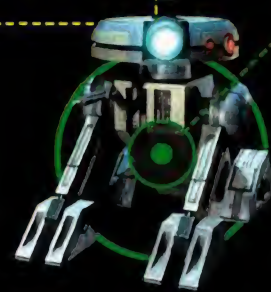
SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

An unflappable dog and a "hyperkinetic rabbit thing" with a gun, Sam & Max's first adventure was a basket of wisecracks in 1993. Their mission to find a circus bigfoot takes them to a massive ball of string, and an underground magnetised vortex. The script was sassy, banterful gold.



FULL THROTTLE

With a bad guy played by Mark Hamill, and the stubbiest hero ever, *Full Throttle* was maybe the first hint that Tim Schafer would end up making *Brütal Legend*. It had a rock soundtrack, and a live band in the TV promo. If Jack Black had been a thing back then, he'd have been all over this.



STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Set 4,000 years before the movies, this is the best game with the LucasArts name on the box. This set BioWare on the path to creating its own universe for *Mass Effect*, and the ultimate failure that was *The Old Republic* MMO.

Pretend man or not, that poor, poor Xbox.



DOMAIN BOUGHT FOR MAD MAX GAME

Warner Bros has bought two domains relating to a forthcoming but unannounced *Mad Max* game. It's hinted that Avalanche Studios is making the title, which seems like a perfect fit – if anyone can capture the madness of Mel Gibson, it's the dev that put a brothel into a volcano.

We'd be mad not to be excited about this.



When Disney bought Lucasfilm, LucasArts, and everything Lucassy, some hoped this would energise the team. We hoped for a revival of their prolonged burst of in-house creative brilliance in the '90s. That hope has proved to be a little... optimistic. Disney still owns it, of course, but the 150 staff have been sacked. When you see the LucasArts name in future, it will be licenced out to

games made by other people. Of course, that's not exactly new. LucasArts' *Knights of the Old Republic* was developed by BioWare, and Pandemic made *Battlefront*. But that means there'll never be another Tim Schafer at LucasArts – unless, of course, it licences out a game to Double Fine. What the future holds for LucasArts is difficult to tell (hint: *Star Wars*). So let's remember some of the characters we've loved over the years.

GAMING SEASONS

- PRE-XBOX The Golden Adventure Years
- XBOX The Enough With The Star Wars Years
- XBOX 360 The Decline Into LEGO



THRILLVILLE

The Xbox never got a decent *RollerCoaster Tycoon* game, but it did get a couple of, cough, inspired homages. *Thrillville* and its sequel, *Off The Rails*, blended a decent management game with slightly duff mini-games. It filled a gap, but it was hardly an iconic moment of originality.



MONKEY ISLAND: SPECIAL EDITION

Ron Gilbert and Tim Schafer's tale of insults, grog, and flaming beards was buffed up, up-rezzed, and served to an eager and nostalgic public. So why not do the same for *Grim Fandango*, Disney? Come on, people.



KINECT STAR WARS

No one had stellar hopes for *Kinect Star Wars*. But it could, at least, have been fun. What we ended up with was neither fan service, nor a child-pleasing toy – just a collection of duff mini-games that had the *Star Wars* label glued on. *Kinect Star Wars: The Devourer Of Goodwill*.

1998

1999

2000

2001

2002

2003

2004

2005

2006

2007

2008

2009

2010

2011

2012



STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT

A *Battlefield*-style shooter built from classic *Star Wars* parts, this and its sequel were hugely popular on the original Xbox Live. Repeated attempts at modern sequels all fizzled out; LucasArts had one in development, known as "Version Two", even as Disney pulled the plug.



FRACTURE

LucasArts has a history of rich, imaginative and funny characters. *Fracture*'s hero Jet Brody? He was an earnest super-marine that made it feel like someone had thrown in the creative towel. The story was about a US divided by global warming, but it was so forgettable it sank without trace.



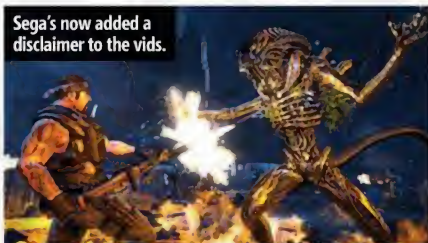
LEGO STAR WARS III: THE CLONE WARS

TT's LEGO franchise dominate in this era – five of the 13 Xbox 360 games from LucasArts were LEGO-themed. Two were *Monkey Island* remakes. The only two games that were actually original were *Fracture* and *Lucidity*. Both were flops.

SEGA "MISLED" WITH COLONIAL MARINES ADS

Sega Europe has been forced to rehash the UK trailer for *Aliens: Colonial Marines* following complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority. Accused of not accurately reflecting the final content of the game, the publisher admitted fault to avoid a formal investigation.

Sega's now added a disclaimer to the vids.



NEW LIONHEAD BOSS A BIG FAN OF FREE

Fable developer Lionhead has a new boss, following the departure of beloved raconteur Peter Molyneux. John Needham has been hired in part due to his expertise with MMOs, free-to-play and subscription gaming – all things that the studio's rumoured to be working on.



Do we really need better graphics?

Does a clearer picture equal a more impressive game?



NO!
Imaginative art direction is more important
Aoife Wilson

When was the last time you were genuinely moved by photorealism in a game? Good graphics may stop you in your tracks to admire the scenery, and they can be an impressive indicator of how far our technology has come, but do they have the power to touch the heart? How important are they, truly, in the long run?

In time, all good graphics will become dated, but a striking, well-considered art style can make a game timeless. Get it right, and your game will transcend its graphical limitations and refuse to be defined by them. It worries me that, whilst they're all in a rush to show off next-gen capability, devs will forget how to make a game look and feel unique.

Does the average gamer really worry about focal length, depth of field or being able to count a character's skin pores? I certainly don't. Ask me to name a beautiful game and I'll mention the gorgeously baroque stylings of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* or the German expressionist-inspired *Limbo*. The soft, almost watercolour visual style of *BioShock Infinite* or *Dishonored*, or the vibrant, cel-shaded aesthetic of numerous indie titles are so much more memorable than your run-of-the-mill big-budget shooter that shows off so-real-you-could-touch-them ammo clips in varying shades of brown. And quite honestly, the uncanny valley is a pitfall that games have yet to climb out of. I think we could all do without being spooked by an endless parade of dead-eyed mannequins next-gen.



YES!
Photorealism is the basic tool for great art
Dan Griliopoulos

If you look at early Picasso, you see a variety of styles, all of them extremely accomplished, but all based on accuracy and the attempt at realism. Only once he'd mastered photorealistic art, did he move to progressively more impressionistic styles, culminating in his stand-out cubist period, which made him the internationally famous artist he is today.

So, simply put, it's easier to produce a variety of art styles if you already have something powerful at your fingertips – whether that's 30 years of practice painting, or a photorealistic game engine. Photorealism isn't just for photorealism's sake – it's for the sake of all art, of all games, for the creation of something more beautiful. *Deus Ex*, *BioShock* and *Dishonored* are built on the bones of a photorealistic engine, with their own art style and filtering tech. Developing for games is like painting an impressionistic image on top of a photo; *Blood Dragon's* neon excellence wouldn't have been possible without *Far Cry 3's* more photorealistic island paradise.

The greater barrier to great art is a lack of imagination on the part of programmers or designers. When I see concept art of a muscular man wielding a machine gun or sword, or a generic office interior, my heart sinks – but to be honest, the same can be said for the tedious Tim Burton pastiche of *Limbo*. We need to research wider, and draw more genuine artists in. When we do, photorealism will be the canvas for their masterpieces.

Agree? Disagree? Leave a comment on this article at oxm.co.uk

YOUR MOST WANTED

THE NEXT XBOX

Final rumours ahead of the reveal

IT'S BEING ANNOUNCED ON TUESDAY 21 MAY

This is official: we're going to be at Microsoft's Redmond HQ for the debut, at 6pm UK time. This will be the first look at the new hardware: most of the games news will come on 10 June at E3.

IT'S POWERFUL

The next Xbox has an 8-core CPU provided by AMD, as well as a 12-core GPU and eight gigs of RAM. That's a significant upgrade, especially from the Xbox 360's measly half gig of RAM.

IT'S GOING TO TAKE OVER YOUR TV

Well, it will if you're American, anyhow. In theory, the new machine will be able to take a cable television signal and overlay features on top. Exactly what these features are aren't yet clear, nor is whether it will work with UK television providers. One possibility is that Kinect's head tracking will pause the screen when you look away.

IT'S STILL ALL ABOUT THE GAMES

Microsoft's going to keep on about "connected entertainment", but games are still going to be big. Rumours suggest big deals with Bethesda and EA, conspicuously absent from the PS4 reveal, as well as a series of proper Xbox exclusives.

Get involved! Join us for live coverage of the reveal from 12pm on 21st May www.oxm.co.uk

LAUNCH TITLES CONFIRMED

There's a new *Forza*. But let's face it, there was always going to be a new *Forza*. More interesting is Crytek's *Ryse* – a Roman-themed Kinect combat title announced during E3 2011 – which may accompany the new machine's debut, adding to Kinect's hardcore credentials.

IT'S KINECTED

This is practically a given: the next Xbox will ship with an improved version of Kinect as standard. One major improvement will be an infra-red sensor, meaning Kinect will be able to perform better in relatively poorly-lit environments.

ALWAYS ON

Much like the iPad, your Xbox will rarely be switched off. It'll quietly download patches and updates in standby, and possibly suspend play, so you can instantly restore a game session. Does that mean always-online? We'll see.

"It's official: Microsoft's new Xbox will debut on the 21 May"

RUMOUR & SPECULATION

INSIDER GOSSIP ROUNDED UP

Outrun developer Sumo Digital is working on three or four major next-gen games, at least one of which isn't a racer.



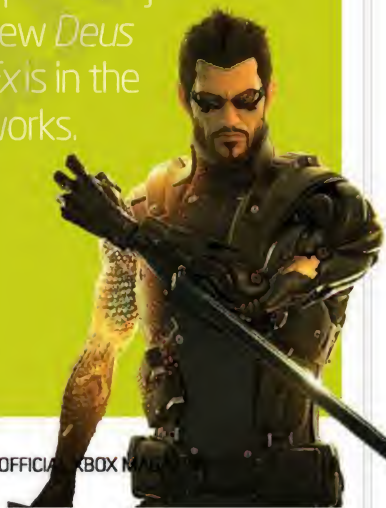
There'll be a new *Halo* game this year – but it could just be the HD remake of *Halo 2*.

Capcom's medieval 'Deep Down' project is, in fact, *Dragon's Dogma 2*.

Three unannounced Xbox exclusives from Rare, Lionhead and Black Tusk will support SmartGlass-style auxiliary play on touchscreens.



Don't be fooled by Eidos Montreal's '*Deus Ex: Human Defiance*' April Fool's joke – a new *Deus Ex* is in the works.



Messages

YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO POST OPINION ON ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING XBOX 360



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Welcome

Letters make words, words makes sentences, and sentences make letters. That's the cycle of letters. It's like the cycle of life, only no one sings and dances about it in *The Lion King*. Anyway, here are some of the letters we've received from you this month...



How could you NOT want to play thiszzzz?

PEER PRESSURE

My friend always tells me to start playing *Black Ops II*, and I keep telling him no. He moans and moans at me, because I play different kinds of games from him. He loves his shooters. I'll admit, I did like *MW2* and *MW3*, but the repetition of first-person shooters are too much for me. I prefer the *Awesomenauts* or destroying wave after wave of Stormtroopers in *The Force Unleashed*. I like the fiction of things. *Far Cry 3* was a shooter with a twist, and that's why I played it. Am I the only one who finds myself pressurised to play what I don't want to play?

David Watts

Tell your friend that you've got a brand new hobby you'd like him to share. Tell him your new hobby is putting your fist into your mouth. Moan and moan at him to join in. Over the course of the day, keep catching his eye, and when he looks, slip your fist into your gob, then raise your eyebrows as if to say "now you do it!". Eventually, he'll crack - and say something like "look, you're being a real weirdo about this. I get your heavy-handed point - no one wants to spend their spare time doing

stuff they don't enjoy. But the way you've gone about making that point has been passive aggressive, creepy, and corrosive to our friendship. I don't even want to play CoD with you any more." Problem solved!

IT DISNEY MATTER

Fair play to Disney and EA for thinking about different gamers. I have an eight-year-old sister who loves to play games like *Minecraft* and *Need For Speed*, rather than shooting games like *Battlefield* and *Call of Duty*. I would also like to point out that in the first *Tomb Raider*, you got to kill as much as you liked, and it was rated 12. But in the new one, you kill a few humans and it's an 18! What the heck?

Dara Sanni

That's Disney for you. It's been elbows-deep in the profit potential of young children for decades. As for Tomb Raider, in the first game you played as a bosomed cluster of isosceles triangles. It's hard to take violence against polygons seriously. Although we reckon PEGI ratings tend to be a little over-cautious, perhaps in response to typical tabloid approaches to gaming, we can see how improved graphics have made in-game violence a more contentious subject.

HELLO NOIRE

I've recently finished playing *LA Noire* and what can I say? Wow! I realise how late I am playing it, but I really think it's one of a kind. I've been gaming since as far back as I can remember and this game is the one for me.



60s pop group idea: LA Noire and the Noisettes.

It's got the style of *The Godfather* and the corruption of *Boardwalk Empire*. Anyone else who still hasn't played it, do so - it's the future. (But in the past.)

Matthew McMahon

It was one glimpse of one possible future, but with Team Bondi closed, the future of LA Noire is uncertain. Rockstar owns the name, of course, but there's zero per cent chance of it talking about it until GTAV is out of the door.

THE ART CRITIC

Art style tells us a lot about a game. *Borderlands* has a cartoony art style, showing that it doesn't take itself too seriously. *Gears of War* has a dark, foreboding art style, showing that the game is dark and sensible. Sadly, a game that once had an excellent art style has changed to be bleak and boring. *Fuse* (when it was called *Overstrike*) looked fantastic from the early trailers, but now resembles a boring shooter with no personality whatsoever. I wish more games had original art styles like *Borderlands* or *Dishonored* instead of the same, boring style that has plagued games for a long time.

Sean Lewis



Thanks for monetising innocence, guys.

"My friend moans at me for not playing CoD"
Gaming's not just about shooty men

Is it true that it's Microsoft's birthday today?
DeathbyLewis1
4 April. We didn't get anything. Worst bday ever.

Can I get a 21st bday call out for my mate Harry?
Amaze HUMANOID
Happy birthday, you fantastic sod.

Noob says what?
Smokin skull64
Excuse us? You'll have to talk slowly. We don't speak noob.

Can you put me in the OXM Fashion Police? It would make my day.
XD Cupcake ZZX
Are you friends with XD Muffin ZZX?



Re: *Injustice: Gods Among Us* sparks superhero comic book chat
Anyone who still thinks Aquaman's a laughing stock should try reading his new 52 run, Geoff Johns is doing a great job with the character.
Wadium_Arcadium

If you think Aquaman is good in that, you should read the *Injustice* comics.
Kiaon

There is one problem, Batman will always win, because he's Batman, and Batman is Batman, aka the Goddamn Batman.
EdDeRs

But what about when he's not Batman?
Metalrodent



Fuse did the opposite to Borderlands. Both games changed art style halfway through development, but in the case of Borderlands, the change was from brown/grey to cartoon. It was only then that people started getting interested. So why Fuse decided to go in the other direction will never be anything other than a mystery to us. Elsewhere in artistic disputes, Aoife and Dan argue art style vs. photorealism on page 20.



The ace *BattleBlock Theater*. Buy it!

NOSTALGIA COPS

Does anyone remember when gaming was fun? When it wasn't all about levelling up? The first time I played on a console was when I was four. I played *Worms* with my dad on the original PlayStation. On my fifth birthday I got an Xbox. I played for hours on *Crash Bandicoot*. And two years ago I got an Xbox 360 and was exposed to the harshness of Live. So much shouting, and so serious. I miss the old days, don't you?

Kai Knight

Nostalgia is a debilitating disease, and early onset nostalgia is particularly tragic. Crash Bandicoot was a terrible game but we all enjoyed it back then, because - well, our critical faculties must have been broken or something. Go back and play it today, and tell us

you're enjoying it on any level that isn't "I have played this before. It makes me remember how I felt when I first played it. And is that Ooga Booga mask racist? I can't tell." The fun games are still there - buy BattleBlock Theater on Xbox Live Arcade right now. It's ten times more joyful than Worms.

DON'T HATE THE TYCOON

I have recently been watching lots of videos on a game called *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3*. Have you have heard of it? It's a game where you design and manage your own theme park. You must provide toilets, food stalls and rides to keep



"I wish more games had original art styles"
You'd get on well with Aoife (p20)



PRIZE!

For writing this month's Star Letter, Harry wins a game from under the pile of out-of-date magazines on OXM Jonty's desk.

LET ME SPREE

I'm playing *Dishonored*, and I am enjoying it. But Arkane, why must you punish us murderous gamers for doing what comes naturally to us - murdering? You've given us a vast array of lethal weaponry including grenades, spring-razors, pistol, crossbow and of course Corvo's blade. However, the only non-lethal weapons are sleep darts and your beefy, unconsciousness-inducing arms. Yet you are presented with negative side-effects and a negative ending if you are a little liberal with the fun, lethal gadgets. Why not give us a truncheon as well as a sword? A concussion grenade, as well as a lethal one? It seems that if you want to be soul-preserving saint (like the game urges you to be), then you have to avoid conflict and action all together and be a ghostly little Corvo. I don't think it's right for a game to punish stab-happy gamers for playing the game the way they want to. You are an assassin, after all!

Harry Burke



No whales here. That's, erm, the wife. Nora.

If you want to kill things in Dishonored, the game does reward you - it adds chaos, which adds more Weepers into the world for you to stab, dice, devour, garrotte and explode. And if you love killing people so much, why would you even want the twee, golden age "good" ending? But you're right about one thing - the people who get the good ending do end up with a lot of tools they're not allowed to use.

TWITTER

@oxmuk

You should make disk trays in the Xbox 720 so it can hold more than one game.

@funtown100

How many games do you actually want to play at once?

Damn you Disney! You just don't close a gaming company, you heartless bastard

@Boopity1

Especially not before it makes *Full Throttle 2*

Disney cancels *Star Wars 1313*? Pure craziness. That game was going to be epic!

@RobJackFace

The worst thing? We'll never know.

Is *Defiance* actually out now? And is it any good? I'm considering a buy.

JordMcKenZ

It's out, but we didn't review from beta access. Review's on page 78.



The PC tycoon game that flopped on Xbox.



people happy. There are endless lists of rides and attractions so you never get bored. I then thought, why is this game not on XBLA? It's a bit like *Halo's* Forge, combined with *Minecraft's* creativity. The game is quite old so they probably aren't going to put it on XBLA, but you never know. And correct me if I'm wrong, but do I have some recollection of *RollerCoaster Tycoon 1* coming out on the old Xbox?

Matthew White

RollerCoaster Tycoon is Chris Sawyer's baby, and those games made him such a mini-legend that when he made a game about train management, it was called Chris Sawyer's Locomotion.

Getting your name into the title? That's Sid Meier status, right there. The first game did indeed come out on Xbox, but Sawyer had little to do with it, and it wasn't a great conversion. But you're not completely out of luck - the Xbox 360 has a Tycoon copycat called *Thrillville: Off The Rails*. It came out in 2007, and it's pretty good.

WE'RE PEN PALS NOW

I've just read your latest mag, and I was pleasantly surprised to see my name in there, as the Star Letter. You asked for my opinion on the redesigned Must Buy list, so here it is! The list is shorter - I'm not sure about that, but I suppose if you do a chop and change each month that shouldn't be a problem. You take out three games, but you don't really say why - like *The Darkness 2* and *DmC*. They're great games. But for the most part I do like what you've done - the page is less cluttered, clearer to read, and it integrates XBLA with boxed games, and I love the three great games



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The Metro printed an article saying Xbox Gamers are better in bed. You said...

What a pointless article. Adam Kennerly Not quite. It was to promote a discount website that we're not naming. Take that, discount site!

Why would people do a study on that. WTF? Justin Eysers To get free coverage in papers, dressing ads up as news.

We have a firm grip and know how to work the thumbs! Dean Morris Did it just get disturbing in here?

LMAO Kieran Read Can't argue there.



FASHION SHOWDOWN AVATAR STYLE FACE-OFF

This month: QsC w4rh0und vs. Cowboy Man 225

COWBOY MAN 225

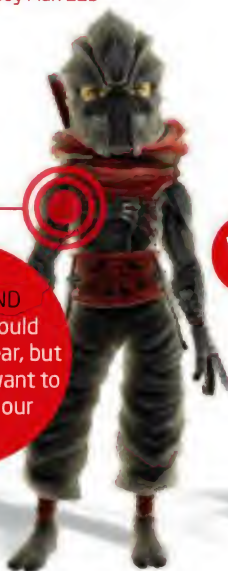
Half cowboy, half man, followed by the number of squares on a scrabble board.

VS

VERDICT

Less exotic, but perfect for a square dance, the cowboy wins a night in a barn. And a game.

QSC W4RHOUND Leggings would suit desert-wear, but we wouldn't want to get sand in our helmet.



A dignified exit from the Must Buy page.

WANT TO BE JUDGED? SEND IN YOUR GAMERTAG



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OXM Log

THE WINNING AVATAR EARNS A FREE XBOX 360 GAME

Actual game depends upon what's in OXM Jonty's drawer!



"Scores as percentages are much more scientific"

There's no science in opinion, Barry

"If *Destiny's* online-only, Bungie can stick it where the internet don't shine" *It's not going to suit everyone*



for a bargain price section. Thanks for putting my letter in your mag – it made the beginning of my wife's birthday that little bit more fun.

Stuart Fitzsimmons

We're glad you sort of liked it. And happy birthday, Mrs Fitzsimmons! We hope he got you something a bit more considerate than a copy of our mag with his letter in it. A copy of F1 Race Stars should be with you right now.

ALWAYS ON

Just got the new mag. Was keen to read the first news about *Destiny*. Got as far as the words "it's online-only, requiring a broadband connection" and immediately lost interest. Why? I have been gaming for 25 years. I have been console gaming for around 20. And in all that time I have found the most enjoyable gaming experiences to be solo and offline. I've tried online. *Call of Duty* was fun, in brief bursts, but only half-hour at most. I have had to cancel my broadband, and since the likes of *Fallout 3*, *Oblivion* etc, I never felt the need to get it again. I was looking forward to *Destiny*, but if it's online-only, Bungie can stick it where the internet don't shine.

Kevin Jones

You're not the only one. An always-online requirement is going to cut out a huge chunk of Xbox gamers. Bungie is clearly hoping that its name will make it a must-buy amongst connected gamers. There's a persistent rumour that the next Xbox will require an always-on internet connection just to work – we're not convinced about that, but expect to hear more news this month, one way or another.

HOMONYM ALARM

I saw someone write in Issue 95 about how there's a lack of gamers online that you can meet. I feel the same way. When

my friends aren't online, it can get lonely – and I thought that the idea of being able to go online was to make NEW friends. Some titles would be a lot more enjoyable if you could just have a laugh with a new friend. If anyone would like to add me, it's MASTER 1Ace1 (also part of a clan). And can't forget the great job you guys at OXM do, keep it up!

Cameron Jones

If you want to be friends with Master Ace, and don't mind that his Gamertag is phonetically identical to one of the core beliefs of Adolf Hitler, then get in touch! It's almost certainly an accident.

WHY OUT OF TEN

Why do you rate games out of ten, and other games reviewers give percentages? Percentages make it look like they put more effort in. Anyone can think of a number out of ten. It's like you're not even trying to be proper reviewers. I suppose you are better than newspapers who only do games out of five (unless they do half-stars in which case you are just as bad again). But percentages are so much more scientific. Although, ideally it should be out of how many games there are, so you could put them all in order.

Barry Fishponds

Scores aren't scientific, Barry. Lords of Shadow scored everywhere from 4 to 9 – that's not science, that's personal opinion. Percentages just create the weird impression that there's a system – that there are 100 distinct levels of how good a game can be. But that's absurd, one man's point-knocking-off sin is another man's must-have selling point. Think of numbers out of ten as a cipher for words: abysmal, terrible, poor, weak, average, above average, good, very good, excellent, and oh my god guys this game is full of everything. Could you do the same for a hundred grades?



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Castle Crashers

Words: Jon Blyth

How MercurySteam made a four-decade-spanning series its own

Publisher Konami
Developer MercurySteam
Players 1
Co-op None

The first *Lords of Shadow* was a genuine surprise. No preview could have done justice to the artistic scope of the game, which devoured inspirations as broad as Guillermo Del Toro and *Shadow of the Colossus*, and boiled them in the stomach acid of *God of War*. But the previews did very little to get across the constantly evolving Gabriel, the glorious locations, and the variety of play styles. One level Konami showcased in the opening round of understated publicity was a clock tower. Another was a fight with a huge castle employee, the Butcher. We asked *Lords of Shadow* producer Dave Cox why that was.

"At that time, we were getting a lot of flak from fans about taking over the *Castlevania* series," explains Cox. "We were a relatively unknown team, and the die-hard *Castlevania* fans had probably written us off already. As such, we wanted to show that we were both huge fans of the original games, but also keen to take it in exciting new directions. The clock tower scene is tied into *Castlevania*'s past - both in terms of content and location." This is true enough - clock towers are a part of *Castlevania*'s thing, as much as boss battles with Death and spooky puppet

shops. "The Butcher was very much a look at where we were taking it. All-new AI, more thought needed to defeat an adversary, and a strong demonstration of Gabriel's abilities. We had to be careful in those early days. Thankfully, the response we had to the final game has made it easier this time round."

There was also a link to Hideo Kojima's studio that felt like an apologetic diversion. It was Kojima's vocal endorsement of MercurySteam's game that finally convinced Konami to make *Lords of Shadow* a fully-fledged *Castlevania* title. But in terms of direct influence, the only real feel of Kojima was a small homage to *Metal Gear Solid*'s ventilation shafts. It must have been a marketing nightmare. *Lords of Shadow* was a vast, long-fused epic, with a battery of new powers constantly unlocking over the first ten hours. How do you show that off with a preview snapshot?

Luckily, MercurySteam doesn't have that problem with *Lords of Shadow 2*. The essentials are already in place. It's got goodwill and momentum to spare. The first game won over all but the most single-minded purists, and the second game *Mirror of Fate*, released only on Nintendo's handheld, combined the style of the main game with a 2D approach that felt as much

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2

 **XBOX 360**
THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE
EXCLUSIVE!



"There'll be no loose ends – this'll be the last *Castlevania* game by MercurySteam"

Shadow Complex as classic *Castlevania*. *Mirror of Fate* expanded the scope of Gabriel Belmont's tale into a dynastic saga that spans and twists the Belmont timeline (see Vampire Gaiden, right). To paraphrase without disappearing into a lore-filled sphincter: MercurySteam is creating an alternate *Castlevania* timeline that's entirely its own.

Out of Steam

That said, *Lords of Shadow 2* is going to be the final *Castlevania* game by MercurySteam. The team will leave no loose ends, because they have no intention of coming back to tie them up. Ask why, and they're pleasingly blunt: "We've told the story we want to tell. There's nothing worse than someone who's said everything they need to say, then carries on talking." That's Enric Alvarez, the guy steering development from the Madrid-based studio.

So, where does that story start? Gabriel Belmont, the hero of the first game, has fallen foul of the most pessimistic prophecies and become Dracula. You still play as Dracula, which means we're either pulling a full-on morality reversal, or a more pungent darkness looms – step into the sulphuric limelight, Satan himself. The mastermind trickster behind the events of the first game has longer-term plans to get himself back into Heaven, and it looks like you're the one who's best-equipped to stop him. Does God have anything to say about his best hope being a void-humping blood-sucker? Typically, He's being a bit aloof about the whole situation.

But who needs direct intervention, when you've got a bunch of fanatical followers? The Brotherhood of Light are battering down the door to Dracula's throne room, where we left him at the end of the first game. Gabriel, to his

credit, is engaging full-on nonchalant mode. It's almost like he knows this is just a combat tutorial.

The basic systems of the first *Lords of Shadow* are intact. It's a game of combo-based combat, blocking and countering, and evasion. It's also a game of resource management, with magic that doesn't regenerate, but has to be earned through combat. The systems may be the same, but the details have changed to reflect the malevolence of their new owner. Your enemies don't drop neutral magic any more, they leave behind blood. You still get to channel this blood energy into two pots, but as

"As Dracula, you're the one best equipped to stop Satan getting back into Heaven"

Gabriel's now the essence of Darkness itself, Light Magic has been replaced by the Void, and Dark Magic is now Chaos.

Being Dracula isn't a matter of translating good into evil – Gabriel has a new range of unique perks. He's now able to transform into a mist, something that's useful for combat, and for passing iron fences. You can glamour mortals, controlling your enemies. You can also "disappear into the night, unseen", which translates into "there may be some stealth bits". If you're unfamiliar with the *Lords of Shadow* system, it's fairly simple: killing an enemy drops blood, and you can funnel that into your Void or Chaos magic bars by pressing the left or right thumbstick. If you want to divvy the blood between the two bars equally, just hold both down.

You can earn more blood by playing stylishly. This is done by filling the



Dracula showing off his Blood Whip.

Focus Gauge. Land a wide variety of combos, block incoming attacks with precise timing, and sneak in a few craft counters, and you'll earn Focus. Most importantly of all, avoid getting hit – this will instantly wipe out your Focus, forcing you to start over.

Blood drive

Once the meter is full, every hit that connects will drop blood. This is good news for a vampire with energy meters to top up, but it gives you a whole new problem to deal with – when do you stop to pick it all up? Pressing in the thumbsticks to slurp up the delicious plasma takes you out of combat, adding a desperate aspect of time management and greed to the middle of a skirmish. If you're low on health, you can use that blood to activate your Void sword and top up your hit



Whatever it is, it's not modern New York.



Alright, tin-wings, let's dance the death jig.


VAMPIRE GAIDEN WHAT HAPPENED IN THE SIDE-STORY THAT DIDN'T MAKE IT TO XBOX

Mirror of Fate began with the story of Gabriel's descendants. Gabriel is unaware that he fathered a son before the events of *Lords of Shadow*. Trevor Belmont was confiscated at birth by the

Brotherhood, and trained to be one of the only warrior Trevors in history. Trevor battled against the Dracula that his father Gabriel had become, but suffered a similar fate, being transformed into Alucard. This


is a reference to the tortured anti-hero who fought against his father, Dracula, in *Symphony of the Night*. Meanwhile, Trevor's son, Simon (a reference to the first ever Belmont in the original 1987


game), survived his parents to go on his own anti-Dracula crusade. Dracula survived to be the star of a game set some centuries later, so you can make your own guesses as to whether he succeeded.

"Aaaaaaaaah. Aaaaah.
Aaaaaaaaahh." 

DON'T BE IGARASHI

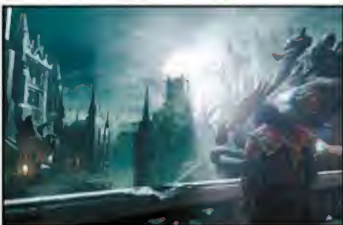
When *Castlevania* fans say they don't like the new trilogy, it's Koji Igarashi's name they howl at the moon. He's behind 14 *Castlevania* games, including three that we personally consider classics. His latest game? It's on Kinect: *Leedmees*.

You can always tell new money. 

That's one stylish suit of armour. 

UNBORN FREE

DAVE COX AND ENRIC ALVAREZ
ON THE ABILITY TO GO AND
LOOK WHEREVER YOU WANT



You feel like you're letting the player make mistakes. How do you decide how much hand-holding to give?

Cox: Getting the balance right between hand-holding and letting the player do what they want is something that a lot of developers struggle with. We let players decide for themselves. A lot of players will follow the story, and that's enough, but giving those players who come back and want extra stuff to explore, you've got to give them something.

You make it sound like there's much more optional stuff in the world, now.

Cox: In games like *God of War*, you never go back. We've tried to make linear play one option - but you can go left, right, soak it all up. You might find an area that looks like a dead end, until you realise you've got the Mist power, and can travel through a grate where there's a whole new level behind. A substantial amount of this world is completely optional.

You said the camera was the hardest thing to get right in LoS2. Why was it so essential?

Alvarez: It's not the camera itself - it's what that change entails. You have to start from scratch with the game. You can no longer force the player to look at a vista you worked really hard on. A free camera can be a problem. With this kind of game, it's not particularly comfortable to handle the camera while you're playing. So we have to find a compromise for people who are good enough to take full control of the camera while fighting, and those who don't want to touch the camera because all their attention is focused on the enemy. There's a law in third-person action games - the further you put the camera from the action, the more problems you have. It's exponential, because the camera starts colliding with everything. You need to be conscious of the funny stuff it gets up to. But we've managed to make a camera that is seamless between using it and not using it.

Cox: I never use the camera. I let it do what it wants, which suits me fine.

Alvarez: It's fantastic. It's one of the best cameras in an action third-person game.



I've a Groupon for a manicure you can have.



That's definitely his moody FB cover pic.



A huge, angry church. Bring it, church face.



You sure this is the castle for Frankenstein?



The golden guy's got a muuuch bigger friend.



No idea what's going on here if we're being honest.



Humans! Bow before my demonic urine icycle.



Impressive whipping range, mister.

points, but lose your rhythm as you change style, and you might end up killing yourself. It's not an easy game.

Dracula's main weapon is the Blood Whip, which sounds like an unappetising ice cream. It has the same extraordinary range, connecting with enemies a quarter of a screen's length away, and clearing a massive space with its lighter area attacks. But this changes when you activate your Void and Chaos magic. A tap of the left bumper drops a new weapon in your hands. The Void Sword has lighter, faster attacks that boost your health when you land a hit.

Tap the right bumper and the Chaos Claws will appear. These are slower and more powerful – you've played videogames, you know the deal – but they are also able to knock out the defences of shielded enemies. It's the old system blended with a touch of modern *Devil May Cry*. Now that the effects of magic are tied into essential parts of the combat in more ways, it's even more important to manage your magic levels. Alvarez promises that you won't be left helpless if you end up facing shielded opponents with an empty Chaos gauge. But he also declines to explain what alternatives will be open to us.

Combo master

The returning Focus system rewards skilled play in a familiar way, and there's a new Mastery system that complements it. You can unlock extra moves and combos by spending XP on them, but the Mastery system intends to prevent you from amassing an arsenal of unlocked and unused combos. After unlocking a new combat move, every time you use it, you'll earn Mastery in that skill. Once it's mastered, depending on the alignment of the skill, it'll level up your Void Sword, Chaos Claws, or Blood Whip. Level up these

"It's a story of three parts, but they can all be enjoyed in their own right"

weapons, and you'll heal faster and break enemy defences more quickly. Stick to a couple of familiar combos, and you'll find yourself struggling when you get to the tougher levels.

The action takes place over two time threads, although MercurySteam is being coy about how this will precisely work. The majority of *Lords of Shadow 2* will take place in the modern day, in a city that's been sculpted to fit the Gothic arches of *Castlevania*. In short, don't expect Times Square. Expect ornate decorations, twisted spires, and a variety of terrains. The rest of the game takes place in the castle, at another point in time. When? From the way our questions aren't answered, that'd obviously be telling.

Will the events of the 3DS side-story have any bearing here? It seems like a strange way to divvy up a trilogy. Is *Lords of Shadow* actually a trilogy? "It's a story in three parts," says Cox, efficiently describing a trilogy. "But they can be enjoyed in their own right. There's no need to have played the first game or *Mirror of Fate* before *LoS2*, but if you have there are nods and winks that pay off." The difference is, the Xbox games are the story of Gabriel Belmont's fall. The 3DS title, *Mirror of Fate*, exists within the same universe, but it's the tale of his doomed offspring.

We loved the first game – but it's extremely possible that our enjoyment was boosted by the massive margin by which it exceeded our low expectations. As good as it was, there were problems. First, there was the camera. Apart from sucking up Dark Magic, the right thumbstick was completely idle. It made the game feel more directed, but that came at the expense of feeling like an explorer. Some paths were rendered obscure, because you hadn't stood in the position that triggered a new perspective. In the new game, you have complete control of the camera.

According to the developer, this has been the hardest thing about developing *Lords of Shadow 2* (see Unborn Free, left). If you decide to leave the camera controls alone, it will play

exactly like the first game. But if you choose to take control, you can now swirl around, making the hunt for the collectibles feel fairer, and a missed branching path feel less like a fault of the cameraman's hand.

The platforming has changed, too. Going back to the first game, it's not as bad as you might remember – there were just moments where the rules and the paths were poorly communicated. The fixed camera didn't help, either, with reachable ledges only appearing in

restricted circumstances – meaning hidden areas could be concealed in places you had no reason to look.

The obvious glints have gone, leaving Dracula to find his own path along the notches and grabbable grooves of the gates out of the castle. If you get stuck, however, a tap of a helper button highlights a chain of anchor points suggesting your path. Having this off by default makes the levels feel less gamey: like the green tarpaulin of *Sleeping Dogs*, it's a way of marking a reachable ledge that doesn't shatter any illusions. On the hardest difficulty, however, those path hints won't be an option.

Clash of the Titans

Another big difference is the Titan battles. In the first game, these saw Gabriel dangling off the limbs of large, lumbering beasts, and stabbing at glowing sigils at different points around their bodies. This next sentence can be taken as a high compliment, or evidence of a brief lapse in originality: Titan battles were a pretty faithful homage to *Shadow of the Colossus*.

In *Lords of Shadow 2*, the Titans feel less like climbing frames, and more like the whole playground. Take the battle that ensues once Dracula has

BEFORE THE SHADOW

MercurySteam is used to working with big names. Its first game, *Scrapland*, was taken under id alumnus American McGee's wing, and its second game, *Jericho*, was written by horror icon Clive Barker. Neither game was brilliant.



Close your mouth, you aren't Ricky Gervais.

PRODUCER
DAVE COX
ON HOW TO
SURPRISE ALL
OVER AGAIN



There's an expectation that sequels will be bigger. Are you regretting how very long the first game was?

Not at all. *Lords of Shadow 2* will be bigger than the first game. But not just in terms of size. The scale of its levels are more epic, its combat system is hugely expanded and adaptable to different playing styles, and its city is a more open experience that we want people to immerse themselves in. Everything about the game is bigger, but it has to be – we have a big story to tell.

Will you have mini-bosses who restore their health if you miss a quick-time event, and long boss fights without mid-battle checkpoints? Or has success made you less evil?

We're more evil, if anything! The whole QTE thing has been cut back, with the Titan fights now far more expansive, and they involve full control by the player as opposed to timed button presses. We've gone for a far greater level of control during every part of the game now, but Gabriel can refuel by draining those around him of their blood – the benefit of being a vampire. We feel the gameplay is more balanced than in the last game, and as a result makes for a more fluid and natural challenge.

You say there are two worlds: City and Castle. How does that split work as you play through?

The city is the main setting for the game, but we can't really go into too much detail about it at present. The city is a living entity, but there's a look and feel to it that harks back to the Gothic realm of the past.

The original *Lords of Shadow* was a bit po-faced. Patrick Stewart sounded like he was going to burst into tears between chapters. In the sequel we've already seen that ridiculous nuke blast that was more *Dragon Ball Z* than Dracula. Are you letting your playful side express itself?

It's a fine line, comedy. Games can be po-faced, but there is nothing worse than a game that tries to be funny, but comes across as wearing. It's like being trapped in the corner at a party by someone who thinks they're hilarious. We knew the part you're talking about was over the top, but it also sells the scale of the conflict – that's not to say the decision to keep it in all its OTT-ness wasn't deliberate!

How do you resist the urge to make jokes about a character called Trevor?

We would never diss a Trevor. A Ralph, maybe, but never a Trevor.



Who's got a sword in his mouth? You have!



Ooh, he doesn't half think he's sexy.



Come and have a go, rubble-knockers.



"So far it's typical LoS: unnecessarily generous and casually overblown"

found his way out of the castle: this creature you're fighting is basically a furious church – a million tons of stained glass and steeped fists, raining blows on Dracula's home. Leaping onto the forearm of the creature, you don't fight the church, but the congregation – you're rushed by the Brotherhood of Light, while a massive ecclesiastical face looks angrily on in the background. This is all part of a long, little and large boss battle, where the little guy is a 12ft-tall Golden Paladin.

All the world

Then there's the biggest improvement for anyone who's used the word 'Metroidvania'. The world is seamless, now – not divvied up into bite-sized locations of verses within chapters. This is the thing that most negatively distinguished *Lords of Shadow* from its *Castlevania* heritage: those highly discrete levels. Sure, the first *Lords of Shadow* had secrets that you had to return to once you'd expanded your powers – and that's definitely something that defines the series, too. But for the sequel the worlds will be continuous and traversable. Mission select screens are gone, replaced with teleportation devices.

"The city is now open to explore," beams Cox. "Unlike the previous game, players can now return to areas they have been in. So, as Gabriel picks up better powers and more abilities, he'll be able to reach parts of the city that he was previously unable to access. These will play host to little bonuses, and reward the player for really exploring this complex location."

In a later conversation that we weren't recording, Cox talked of whole optional areas, a substantial percentage



of the game that's a completely optional reward for dedicated players. Return to a grill once you've discovered the Mist ability, and you can pass through it to discover not just a chest, but a whole hidden area.

Back in the demo room, we're reaching the end of the long battle with the Golden Paladin. This is the end of the demo, and they decide to leave us with a "oh-no-he-didn't" finale. The Paladin presents Dracula with a glowing blue cross. Dracula's response creates that ambiguity that will span the whole game: he embraces it, informing the pious assembly that he, Dracula, is God's chosen one, so basically they're wasting their time. The next thing that happens is so stupid, it's brilliant, and was included only after some soul-searching within MercurySteam. The camera pulls back to the planet, where we witness nothing short of a nuclear explosion.

Well, it's one way to reset Dracula's powers before the game proper begins. This is typical *Lords of Shadow* – unnecessarily generous, and casually overblown. In the first game, you'd get needless, house-sized bosses at genuinely unexpected moments. It was like MercurySteam was so keen to impress, it just couldn't stop itself. In the sequel, we've just torn apart a massive Titan boss, buckle by buckle, mastered the attacks of an over-powered flying Golden bloke, and triggered a nuclear explosion powered by the fusion of ultimate good and evil. All of which was part of a tutorial and prologue. Where this "story in three parts" will end is anyone's guess, but one thing's for sure: this time, we won't be easily surprised. This time, MercurySteam won't have the luxury of low expectations.

THE NEXT BIG THING MercurySteam is emphatically not doing another *Castlevania* title after this. So what's next? Would Konami turn it loose on another one of its brands? "As far as our relationship with Konami goes, I think that the sky is the limit," grins Alvarez.



Titans. They're a bit bigger this time.



PROFESSIONAL KILLERS

As Activision puts up a million-dollar prize for the best CoD players, we find out what it takes to be a pro gamer in the growing world of eSports

Words: Aoife Wilson





A view to a kill: the finals from a competitor's POV.



Teams were competing side by side on stage.



The set-up for the main stage of the final.



spotlight hits the stage of the Palladium Theater on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. As music blares, an announcer calls the name of a young man, barely 18, who lopez into view. He's nervous and shows it; this moment is the culmination of months and weeks of training. But he raises his arms and waves - and the crowd goes wild. They cheer and chant his name while cameras broadcast his face to thousands watching around the world.

He walks forward to join his three team-mates, and together they enter a darkened, soundproof booth and sit, flexing their fingers and donning heavy-duty headsets. Almost in tandem, they each pick up a game controller, faces fixed in fierce concentration. Next to them, an identical booth houses their four opponents, gazing with identical intensity at the loadout screen for *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*. The match begins, and in moments the arena is filled with the sound of frantic gunfire, excited cheering, and rapid-paced commentary from two experts sat alongside.

This is the Call of Duty Championship 2013, the latest effort by Activision to convert its million-selling franchise from game to sport. 32 teams from across the globe entered, through existing gaming leagues and Call of Duty ELITE, and two months later only two remain, slugging it out for a \$400,000 top prize. To do what they do is a dream for many people sitting in the crowd and watching at home, but the path to success isn't an easy one.

"eSports is currently the biggest it's ever been, by far," says Rich McCormick, who covers the industry for PC Gamer. "According to Blizzard CEO Mike Morhaime, *StarCraft II* now has more viewers than the NHL. It's a multi-million-dollar industry, and many of its professionals are making good salaries or impressive tournament winnings."

Blizzard - Activision's other half - has been a huge part of this. PC strategy title *StarCraft* became hugely popular as a spectator sport in Korea on release in 1998, but its sequel, *StarCraft II*, surprised everybody - including Blizzard - by becoming hugely popular in the West as well. Its blossoming eSports community was spotted by free-to-play upstart Riot Games.

"Where Blizzard used to let tournaments like Major League Gaming provide their own prize pots and operate independently, Riot unified the competitive *League of Legends* scene into "seasons" and provided millions of dollars of their own money for winners," explains McCormick. The tactic was mirrored by Valve, which coughed up a million dollars as top prize for a recent tournament for its free-to-play battle game *Defence of the Ancients 2*. Between *StarCraft*, *LoL* and *Dota2*, eSports has spread away from its Korean heartland to become a truly international sport - complete with pro commentators, hugely popular live broadcasts, celebrity players and millions of fans.

"The eSports bubble is growing, and encompassing the world for the first time," says McCormick. "It's still a bit wobbly as business practices haven't yet been laid in, but it'll be hard to pop at this point thanks to big investment from both hyper-engaged communities - many of whom don't even play the game they watch - and the companies who make these games."

It's a multi-million-dollar industry that Activision wants to be a part of, which is why it's shipped the world's best *CoD*

players to Hollywood, installed a live broadcast with professional commentators, and put up a million-dollar prize pool. But there are two big differences to Valve and Riot's approaches: first, *CoD* is an FPS - a world away from the strategy titles that drive eSports on PC. Second, it's being played on Xbox 360 - which may well help to bridge the gap between pro-gamers and those wishing to join their ranks.

Black Ops II was specifically built for competitive gamers, with the addition of commentating tool CoDCast and matchmaking system League Play. David Vonderhaar, *Black Ops II*'s game design director, is hoping that with its following and these features, it'll be the game to push competitive console gaming to mainstream success. "This is a franchise with 30 million fans," he says. "There hasn't been a way to figure out who the best player is and best teams are until the Championship, and I think that part of it is an interesting dynamic of what's happening here. The guys at home will see this and be exposed to a broader range of people, and then maybe they'll be interested, maybe they'll find a team that they want to follow, maybe they'll play League Play. I think you've gotta just show this to people."

Vonderhaar freely admits that competitions like this may influence how the developers approach the game later on. "There are actually multiple developers from Treyarch roaming the floors, because where else are you going to see the top 32 teams in one building, throwing down against each other? Watching what they do

"It's a multi-million-dollar industry that's encompassing the world for the first time"

PRO ESPORTS COMMENTATOR BEN 'BENSON' BOWE TALKS A GOOD GAME



How did you get started?

I got into commentating a few years ago, just by uploading videos to YouTube and talking over them. After a while I realised I was actually quite good, so went looking for a platform on which I could perform. I fell straight into the competitive eSports scene. My big break was the European Gaming League – the biggest competitive event organiser in Europe. I just mailed them and said, "I love casting, here is some of my work, what do I need to do for you to give me a chance?" It was a bold move as I was still relatively unknown, but they were great and gave me lots of advice. I took it all on board, and got offered the opportunity to commentate Competitive *Call of Duty* at EGL6 in Sweden. Looking back it was a massive risk on their part, but I was well received and formed a great working relationship with EGL.

What do you need to be a good caster?

Obviously, you need to be able to string a sentence together. Having a broad vocabulary helps too, as you can add colour to your casting. You need to know as much about the game as you can possibly discover – in *CoD*, that means knowing things like spawn locations and flag routes. And you need to be versatile. At some point you'll have to think on your feet; technical issues can happen at any time and you need to be able to keep the audience entertained.

Do you see CoDCasting being as popular as professional sports commentary?

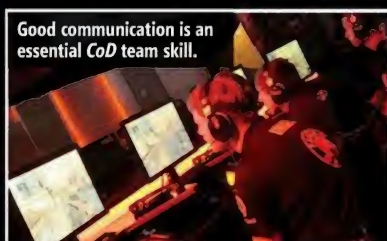
Absolutely. eSports has had a phenomenal growth spurt over the last few years, with more money being thrown into the industry. The more money we have, the higher the level of competition becomes across the board. Casting then becomes essential to not only describe the viewing experience, but also help those that don't understand what they are seeing.

How can people get into it?

Start on YouTube, talking over replays, then try talking over live games – that's the hardest part. Practise commenting on friends games, offering analysis to the camera and explaining why they're doing what they're doing. You need to be really, really good at this so spend as much time on it as you can. Next you'll need a friend to partner with, someone who you gel with but aren't too similar – my partner Bricey is the perfect foil for me because he does the analysis while I get excited. Once you're confident working together, start looking for small jobs and try to get noticed. It might take a while, but with the way the community is heading now, it would be well worth it.



OpTic Gaming's Nadeshot plays as the crowd looks on.



Good communication is an essential *CoD* team skill.



Matches on the first day were played round robin.



Plenty of *CoD* players have huge fan followings already.



Competitors have intricate knowledge of mode maps.



CoDCasters provide crucial play-by-play commentary.

is an important part of keeping in touch with how that game is played and how they're using the game. You can learn a lot of lessons about that, which apply to the macro game."

By the second day, half of the initial 32 teams are gone, and to the surprise of many, UK team Fariko Dragons were amongst those knocked out early. Fariko Gaming still has two teams in the running: US team Impact and Dutch team AllStars. Fariko's owner, Alexander Korf, started the company in 2006 as an IT consultancy, but was a keen gamer who saw the potential of eSports and decided to get involved with sponsoring and training young hopefuls. He's developed his own method of encouraging them to join Fariko's ranks.

"I call it the Yin Yang formula," he explains. "In one country there's only one Yin team, and it gets funding to enter a tournament, and 100 Euros per person to spend. There are multiple Yang teams in the same country, and when a Yang team outplays a Yin team, they automatically become the new Yin and get funding. It really stimulates teams to get out there and compete for it." Korf also acknowledges the difficulty that many aspiring pro-gamers will encounter in getting the backing that they need. "At this point in time it's quite difficult to gain sponsorship," he says. "All you can do is do your best, improve, and hopefully you will play as well in a tournament and be noticed by a sponsor."

Korf strongly believes that the accessibility of console eSports, and of *CoD* in particular, is a big part of its appeal to competitors and audiences alike. "In *CoD*, it is possible, even for me,

to kill one of those top players. It's like playing poker; everyone thinks that if they get a good hand, they'll win. It's the same with *CoD*, and that's what makes it so attractive for a huge amount of spectators and gamers."

The flipside is that *CoD* changes every year, which means that it doesn't have the foundation that other eSports depend on. "There's no time to build the infrastructure, set up the tournaments and let the community coalesce when you're bouncing between games every year," says McCormick. "StarCraft's been played professionally since 1999, *Dota* in some form for a similar time. *LoL* had success by updating *Dota*'s template and pulling in an existing community, same with *Dota2*. To try and engender, nurture, pay, and grow a community in less than a year is near impossible."

Black Ops II's casting features are a step in the right direction, but the proof will be in this year's game – the tenth in the series, widely expected to be *Modern Warfare 4*. If Activision can nail down an eSports game mode that doesn't get radically redeveloped every year then *Call of Duty* could join the eSports luminaries. Or it could just bully its way in, McCormick admits. "The thing about *CoD* is that millions play it, so

"Just as athletes practise and work hard, so do we"





Matches are fast and furious, so quick reflexes are key.

some of these issues are ameliorated by sheer weight of numbers." Easy entry counts for a great deal.

Though anyone can enter and perhaps even win, most pro-players agree that there's still a huge amount of skill and dedication necessary to reach the top and stay there. "You've got to play and be dedicated," says Jordan Kaplan of US team EnVyUs. "You don't see athletes just turn up and play; they practise and work hard. You've got to be the same for this... you've got to learn how we play and what we do different that you don't. That's really all it is."

Be the best

"If you want to be dedicated, start off on ladders and stuff like that online," says Christopher Duarte, better known as Parasite and captain of tournament favourites Fariko Impact. He maintains an impeccably calm demeanour throughout the Championship, and is, in

his team's own words, 'confident, not cocky.' He continues: "360Icons is a good website for *Call of Duty*, so is GameBattles. Make friends in the community; don't necessarily just play with people you know in real life." He's quick to impress the responsibility of competing. "It turns into a business, in a way. These events are no joke, they're meant to be taken seriously when the time comes, and that's how we treat it."

Impact's upbeat attitude and even-tempered approach towards competing certainly pays off. They breeze through the majority of the tournament, losing only once to EnVyUs on the end of the second day to place them against OpTic Gaming in the semi-finals. After an incredibly close match, Impact eventually secure their place in the final against EnVyUs by dominating OpTic in *Black Ops II*'s Hardpoint mode.

Of course, *CoD* isn't the only game in town. UK-based twins Will and Alex

HOW TO BE AN ESPORTS STAR

The skills you need to top the leagues

PRACTICE

Training yourself to be a better player doesn't just mean playing all day, every day. Hone your reflexes and learn how to use the environment to outsmart your opponents. Don't just play with friends - you need to challenge a wide range of players to improve.

STREAM

YouTube and Twitch are valuable tools. The videos provide invaluable insight into how and why other players have developed tactics different to yours. Make friends in the community, and they'll offer feedback and tips on how to better your approach.

COMMUNICATE

No matter how good your gun skills are, you're only as good as the team you're part of. Learn together - how to cover one another, how to communicate quickly and efficiently and how you should work together to achieve your mutual objective.

Buck play *Halo* competitively. They're one half of the Mad Catz-sponsored Western Wolves, and have competed in and won a string of tournaments in the last few years. "It is a game, but if you want to do well, you have to take it seriously. You're playing for a lot of money and there's a lot on the line every time you play, so the more you practise and think about what you're doing every time you spawn or whatever, you can make better judgements."

Maintaining dedication, perfecting your skills and netting sponsorship are important in 'making it' as a pro-gamer, but they aren't the only steps a competitor will need to take to succeed. A common trait amongst the most successful and well-known pro-gamers is that they all stream online regularly, and have spent time and effort cultivating a following on YouTube or gaming service Twitch.tv.



The best teams remain calm under pressure.



Making that final shot in Search and Destroy.



Chris 'Parasite' Duarte celebrates their win.



Impact model their Championship rings.

They see community support and exposure as not only as a way to build themselves up, but to encourage the growth of the pro-gaming scene in general. "It's really important to have those people in the community and those people that not only entertain, but whose fan base just grows and grows - and that only builds eSports more and more," says Duarte.

As seen on TV

The biggest eSports stars command huge follower and subscriber counts. Duarte himself has over 29,000 followers on Twitter, with over a million views racked up on his Twitch account, ParasiteTV. Matt 'Nadeshot' Haag, from the CoD Championship's second runner-up team OpTic Gaming, has more than 130,000 Twitter followers and over 15 million views on his YouTube account, numbers which recently earned him a lucrative sponsorship deal with Red Bull. Popular YouTube CoD



The final was very close, and the crowd felt it.



Treyarch CEO Mark Lamia with the winners.

player and commentator Tom 'Syndicate' Cassell, who isn't a pro-gamer himself but enthusiastically supports the scene, has over 750 million YouTube views on his channel, TheSyndicateProject. People like these are instrumental to the continued popularity of eSports. "They push it out to more of the casual viewers that just watch YouTube," Duarte explains, "so really, without them the scene would not have grown as much as it did."

Though monetising their online streams and subscriber base is a way of supplementing income for a few of the bigger eSports stars, the reality for most is that competitive gaming is not yet a long-term sustainable career. The Buck Twins, arguably one of the most successful competitive teams for Halo, still don't see gaming as their full time job. "We'd love to do it long term," says Will, "but at the moment it isn't really justifiable. We still have to work a little bit, but it's a dream to actually become professional gamers and not have to

worry about other commitments - to just focus on full-time gaming and actually make a living from it." The twins, both bartenders, are currently looking at ways to progress their eSports career.

To make an eSports-dependant livelihood a reality, teams need sponsorship. Without more tournaments with large prize pools to attract sponsors, that's hard to come by, so for many competing remains a part-time endeavour. This is probably why most of the players present at the Call of Duty Championship are students; young men free of other pressing commitments. For the lucky few who do succeed though, the tournament's cash prizes can expand horizons and offer new opportunities. Fariko Impact's Marcus 'MiRx' Carter has helped his team achieve victory in every tournament they've entered in the last couple of months, ensuring an equal share of their total winnings, estimated at hundreds of thousands of dollars. Until recently, he worked at Starbucks.

"We want to grow eSports into the next NFL or soccer"

LEAGUES APART

Not a CoD fan? There are other sports to try



FIFA 13

If you're a footy fan, there are plenty of leagues dedicated to FIFA 13 online. Both EGL and MLG currently host dedicated FIFA tournaments, and MLG's GameBattles site can help newcomers get started with their first match-ups.



STREET FIGHTER IV

Fighting games have long inspired dedicated global tournaments. Capcom in particular has been supportive of eSports, hosting several tournaments last year to celebrate SF's 25th anniversary.



HALO 4

Halo has enjoyed a dedicated eSports following for a while now, with Halo 4 the latest title to explode onto the pro circuits. There are thousands of teams online, as well as hundreds of competitive video streams to watch and learn from.



GEARS OF WAR JUDGMENT

Though a relative newcomer to the competitive scene, Gears of War: Judgment's team-based OverRun mode was specifically designed with eSports in mind, MP lead Quinn DelHoyo revealed earlier this year.



An entire match can change in an instant.

E NUMBERS

Some important eSports figures

4

players in each professional *Call of Duty* team.

£240

The typical cost of a tournament team pass.

\$134,171

The prize money won on *Black Ops II* through the GameBattles website.

£5000

Minimum prize money for *Black Ops II* at ECL9.

170

The number of countries MLG streams broadcast to.

32

teams at the *Call of Duty* Championship.

600,000

unique broadcasters streaming games via Twitch every month.

1,019,779

The number of *Black Ops II* matches played through the GameBattles website.



Wonder who won the right to take the trophy home.

Fariko's leader Alex Korf says that he wants to offer his teams guidance to "make sure they don't do anything crazy with the money and help them - if they want - to prolong their gaming career."

Though none of the teams at the Championship are under any illusion as to the limited longevity of an eSports career, they all seem eager to pursue one as long as they are able to do so. It's not always for financial gain either; all of the competing teams recognised console eSports as a growing industry that they passionately want to support. It's also, simply, easy to get into, as Will Buck points out. "The thing about console eSports is that everybody has a console at home. It makes it so much easier to be a pro-gamer... you can literally sit at home in your living room, play a game, and then the next minute you're playing for a million dollars."

At the final, Fariko Impact and EnVyUs do just that. In the VIP section overlooking the tournament, Treyarch employees were behind some of the

loudest cheers from the crowd as the teams battled neck and neck for best of eleven through six alternating matches of Capture the Flag, Search and Destroy and Hardpoint. It was anyone's game until the final moments, when Impact cinched the win in a Search and Destroy standoff and laid claim to their \$400,000 grand prize. Jubilant, they were immediately looking forward to entering their next competition.

As to the Championship's long-lasting effect on the eSports industry, OpTic Gaming's Will 'BigTymeR' Johnson put it best. "I'm glad we were able to put on a good show; I know it's good for the growth of eSports. I want the entire thing to grow, not only *CoD* but all of eSports - *StarCraft*, *LoL*. I want all of us to grow together so it's something that we can sustain for ten, 15, 20 years, grow it into the next NFL, soccer, whatever it may be. We want to grow so we can be called one of the pioneers of this thing; we were one of the first ones to do it. That's the plan."



HALO 4

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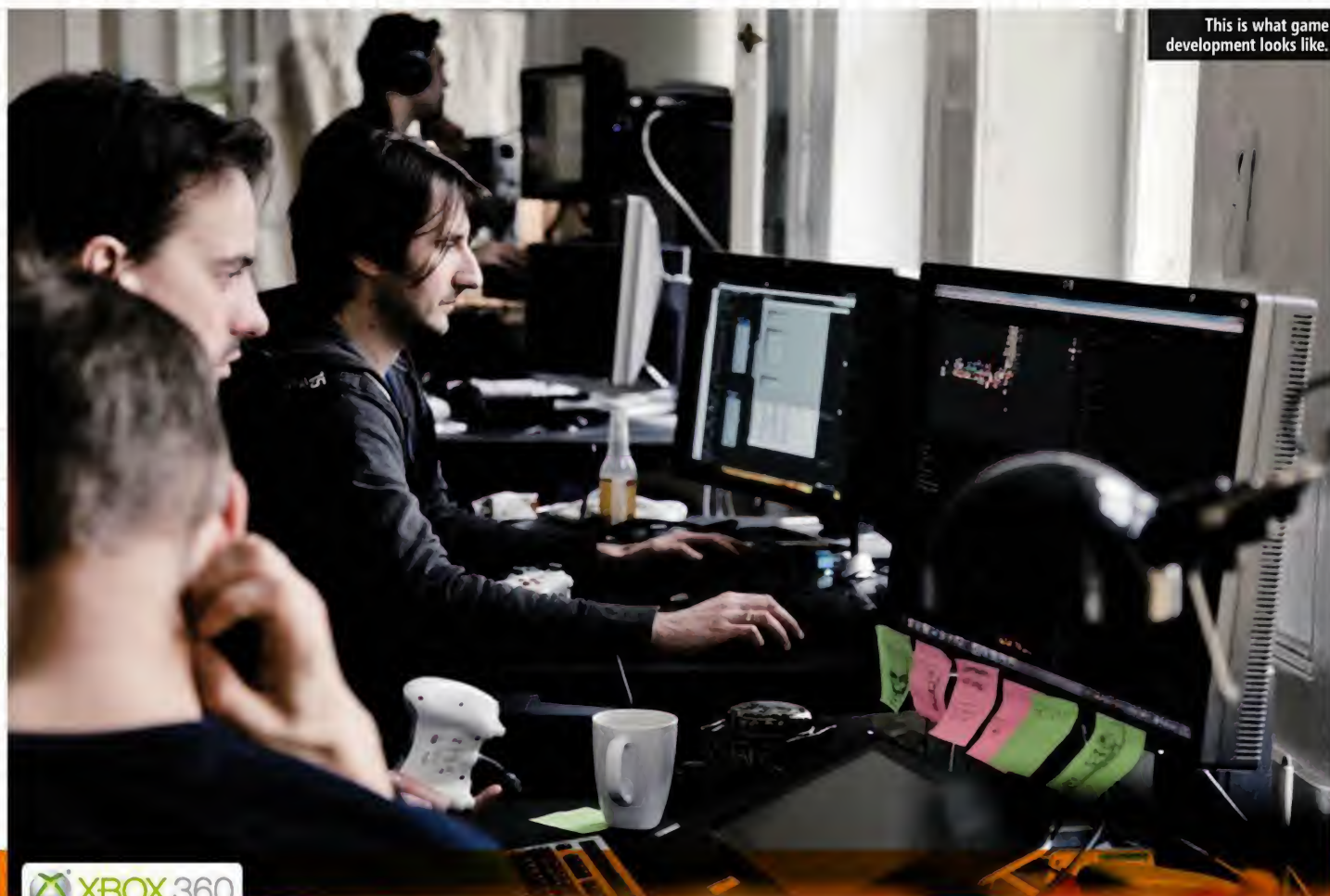
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THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE
EXCLUSIVE!



We looked everywhere for a new Xbox dev kit.

DETAILS

STUDIO PRESS PLAY
ESTABLISHED 2006
LOCATION COPENHAGEN
GAMES RELEASED
MAX AND THE MAGIC MARKER
(MULTIPLE PLATFORMS, 2010)
TENTACLES: ENTER THE DOLPHIN
(WINDOWS PHONE, iOS, 2012)

Max has gained
a brother
between games.



Words: Craig Owens

INDIE INCORPORATED

This time last year, independent developer Press Play had never made an Xbox game. What made Microsoft add the studio to its portfolio?

Press Play doesn't feel like a first-party studio. For one thing, it's small: occupying a cluster of bright, airy rooms towards the top of a compact converted office building in Copenhagen. Secondly, just in case you missed that last sentence, it's in *Copenhagen*. Microsoft's European presence on the development scene has always traditionally had a UK slant, with powerhouses Lionhead and Rare being flanked by a small collection of London studios. Thirdly, of course, there's the tiny matter of this seven-year-old studio never actually having made an Xbox game. Yet, in June of last year, Microsoft quietly snapped up the studio, following its acquisition of Twisted Pixel some months before.

Now, to be fair, just because Press Play hasn't been making Xbox games doesn't mean it hasn't been busy. The studio has two games to its name, and both display precisely the kind of imaginative flair you'd be on the lookout for if you'd stuffed your big fat corporate wallet into your pocket and gone indie shopping. *Max and the Magic Marker*, originally released for the Wii

in 2010, but subsequently ported to PCs, Macs, Windows Phones, iOS devices and pretty much any console you can name (except the Xbox) is a high-concept downloadable title built on a fantastic idea. It's a platform game in which you draw the platforms, and a puzzler in which you sketch the solutions. At any moment you can freeze time and start scrawling on the screen. Unfreeze the image and the drawing drops – as a solid, physics-enabled object – right into the game. It wasn't perfect – the mechanic was too overpowered for the challenges surrounding it – but it was fun.

Press Play's second game was *Tentacles: Enter the Dolphin*, a Windows Phone 7 exclusive at launch that saw you play a weird-looking abomination that resembled a cross between a sea urchin and an octopus. Accidentally swallowed up by your mad scientist creator (who, by the way, was a dolphin) you had to explore his innards by hooking your stretchy limbs onto the walls of his blood vessels and major organs. Once you'd done so, their stretchy elasticity would tug you along.

Max and the Magic Marker and *Tentacles* are two very different games then,

especially in terms of art style – the cute, doodled nature of *Max* contrasting heavily with *Tentacles'* grotesque charms. But they have more than a few things in common, things that clearly marked Press Play out as a studio worth watching in Microsoft's eyes: imagination, novel mechanics and a solid, physics-based foundation.

Indie darlings

Press Play's one of a number of indies ensconced in this building on Copenhagen's Pilestræde. Beneath our feet are the old offices of *Limbo*-creator Playdead, which just recently moved to a building across the road. A number of less well-known studios fill out the remaining floors – and there's a strong community vibe here, exemplified by the fact that everyone eats

"They wanted a team with the potential to make weird stuff"



That's co-founder Mikkel Thorsted in the glasses.

together in a large room converted into a cafeteria. We'd like to say it's like stumbling into a secret commune of indie devs, and it is – barring one complication: Press Play isn't really an indie any more.

Press Play first started working with Microsoft on *Tentacles*, which was an early exclusive for Windows Phone 7. "What Microsoft realised with *Tentacles* is that we could do something different," explains studio co-founder Mikkel Thorsted. "It and *Max* and the *Magic Marker* were both unique. At that point we had a third game that they liked a lot [since cancelled]. That's how we got on their radar.

"Microsoft was after people who could do unique content and make weird games, but it also needed a team that wasn't huge, that hadn't made breakout hits – because they would be [expensive]" he adds, laughing. "It was looking for a team with the potential to make weird stuff. We were one of the very few. A perfect match."

Still, looking around the studio, things don't feel very corporate. There's no suit-and-tie-wearing, briefcase-wielding g-men, for instance. In fact, if we didn't know better we'd have assumed that Press Play was just another indie development house in a building full of them.

We ask how things have changed following Microsoft's acquisition. "For us, it's very important that what Microsoft offered was what they call a microstudio approach," explains Thorsted. "They didn't want to touch who we are, what we do or how we do things. But they wanted to support what we were doing, and for us that wiped away everything that was negative about being indie – it gave us the chance to do greater games and not be worried about economics while we do it."

The first game to emerge as a result of this new relationship is *Max: The Curse of Brotherhood* (out next month). A semi-sequel, semi-reboot of *Max and the*

Magic Marker, *Brotherhood* switches the "draw anything" gimmick of the first game for an environmental manipulation conceit that sees you pulling vines, branches, water and rock from the level itself in order to solve puzzles and journey onwards. While *Brotherhood* was already in development when Microsoft bought Press Play, the team has found the transition to exclusive, single-format development a relief after *Max* and the *Magic Marker*'s many ports.

"It has allowed us to focus on what is important: the gameplay," says lead artist Lasse Middelbo Outzen. "Instead of having to worry about all kinds of input devices, resolutions, graphics cards and different physics calculations, we can take our ideas and implement them without having to go back and forth too many times."

New dimension

The game certainly looks the better for it – the simple cartoony style of *Magic Marker* has been swapped for atmospheric 2.5D visuals smothered in effects work, with lighting and particle effects conspiring to bring to life a slightly Scandinavian-inspired fantasy realm. One segment, in which Max journeys through a creepy, fog-shrouded forest, suggests some of *Limbo*'s artistic principles might have worked their way up through the floorboards. But above all, playing *Curse of Brotherhood*, with its charming style, absence of guns and its platform mechanics, it's impossible to come away

Max appears to have stolen Mikkel's spare pair.



NEW DIMENSIONS

Max and the Magic Marker had a cartoony art style that made perfect sense given its drawing theme. *Curse of Brotherhood* has kept the pen, but dropped the look. Why? "We wanted to try something new", says lead artist Lasse Middelbo Outzen. "Creating hand drawn assets for a five-hour-long game is an immense task, so we would never

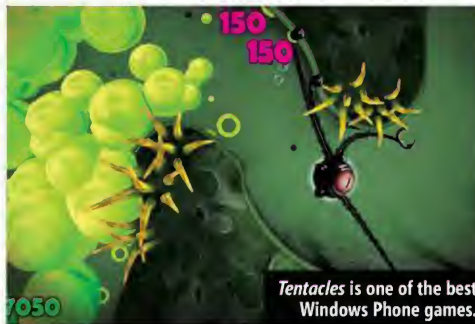
have been able to create the same sensation of depth and variation using 2D sprites as we have with 3D objects. We [also] use the camera in a nontraditional way even for a 2.5D platformer: we zoom in on Max in tight spots, pan out for big panoramas and twist and turn the camera to create a believable, deep and solid world."



Max's pen is a lovely, non-violent tool.



Most of our Magic Marker doodles looked this messy.



Tentacles is one of the best Windows Phone games.

with the impression that this – corporate ownership or not – is an indie game.

"The term 'indie' has become a genre. Even if you're part of a big company you can do games within that genre," argues lead game designer Mikkel Martin Pedersen. Thorsted concurs: "It means games where you push limits and you're not tied up on a big production, and you can change things halfway through production."

"We've actually started calling ourselves 'corporate indie,'" says Thorsted, before breaking into slightly embarrassed laughter at the paradoxical phrase. "One thing about [being indie] is that the motivation for the game is not making money," he continues. "Our priority is to make something that we can be proud of, something that we all put our hearts in. And I'm pretty sure that if you ask anybody on the team, they see their heart somewhere in the game."

But what about the evil corporate taskmasters? Surely they have their eye on the budget sheets? "We have a manager in Microsoft Game Studios," acknowledges Thorsted. "As long as he can see we've thought about what we're doing he's always backing us. We just need to be responsible, doing sound business, as we always have, as we'd do if Microsoft wasn't there."

Perhaps the biggest indication that Microsoft is approaching Press Play with a light touch is that *Max: The Curse of Brotherhood* doesn't feature Kinect support, which belies the commonly held belief that Microsoft is overly keen to

"Our main priority is to make something that we're proud of"

encourage its adoption by its first-party studios. "Porting *Max and the Magic Marker* for almost any input device in existence gave us a good notion of what works in this type of game," says Outzen. "Kinect is great, but moving the marker around requires minute precision, and that's where it falls short. At least for now."

It's that "At least for now" that intrigues us. It's bet-your-inheritance guaranteed that the next Xbox will come with an improved version of Kinect, and we wonder if the real reason Microsoft snapped up Press Play was due to its experience working across multiple input devices. Factor in its familiarity with touchscreen controls and you have the perfect studio to work on SmartGlass-enabled games, too. Not that Press Play has *anything* to say about any future consoles, of course.

Indies will be important next gen. As the cost of triple-A development soars, traditional exclusives will become increasingly rare (barring, of course, first-party titles like *Halo*), and so it'll fall to consoles' indie line-ups to differentiate

ADVANCED CALLIGRAPHY

How Max's magical marker pen has evolved



1 FRESTYLE In the first game, Max's pen could be used to draw anything. So long as it was orange. Once you'd done so, it would pop into existence right there on the screen. The problem: you ended up drawing an awful lot of staircases.



2 PEN BY NUMBERS Now you can only draw from one of these nodes. It's a limitation, but one that has allowed Press Play to come up with more focused puzzles. Drawing staircases, even really big ones, is unlikely to help you here.



3 MIX AND MATCH Interactions between the different substances you can conjure adds another layer to the puzzling. Vines can be attached to branches, fire can burn everything, and branches can be balanced on summoned pillars of rock.

them from one another. The community-curated nature of Xbox Live Indie Games was a well-intentioned failure, producing more than a few diamonds, but burying them far too deep in the Xbox Dashboard to ever achieve mainstream success. The alternative, of course, is to simply level the playing field, to make it as easy as possible for developers of any size to get content on to the same digital marketplace – like, for instance, the iOS App Store.

But perhaps Press Play represents a different approach, a policy of handpicking promising independents, bringing them into the fold, and letting them retain their indie spirit. Trying to blend indie attitudes with corporate structure doesn't always work, but we look forward to seeing what this passionate bunch of creatives can do with a big business backing them up.



Spoiler warning!

Goodnight Shepard

Words: Francesca Reyes

Now the curtain has finally fallen on the Mass Effect trilogy, we asked its creators at BioWare about their highs, lows and missed connections along the way

CASEY HUDSON PROJECT DIRECTOR

I was the project lead from the start of the series, coming off of a fun and successful project with *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. *KOTOR* was the first full game project that I led, and it had plenty of challenges of its own. But taking on a new generation of technology and building a new science-fiction universe was definitely a step up in difficulty and risk.

Our first job was to start laying out the fundamentals of our new universe - would there be time travel? Teleportation? Alien races? Who am I as a player and what is my role in the universe? These things would form the basic parameters of the stories we would be able to tell.

PRESTON WATAMANIUK LEAD DESIGNER

The first thing I did on the trilogy was start working out details of the IP with Casey Hudson and [writer] Drew Karpysyn. Species, ships, background, etc.



MAC WALTERS LEAD WRITER

Developing lore for the series was first up. But the first content I worked on was small plots and characters on the Citadel. Chloe Michel, the Volus and Eclor ambassadors, the Asari Consort and her staff.

DUSTY EVERMAN SENIOR LEVEL DESIGNER

I started out as lead cinematic designer. After a detour onto *Jade Empire*, I came back as lead technical designer and implemented the Normandy.

MIKE GAMBLE PRODUCER

My first job on the *Mass Effect* series was as a development manager. I was responsible for working with the team on *Mass Effect 2* to deliver the Cerberus Network mechanism.



#1// FAVOURITE CHARACTERS

CH: The Illusive Man was fun. It actually started with an idea I had for a name for one of our early graphics engines. Then when we were thinking about ideas for DLC on *ME1*, I was interested in the idea of someone who was so powerful that they told galactic leaders what to do. And because he would be a master of manipulating information and would work in total secrecy, the Illusive name came up again. We never used that idea for DLC, but we brought the idea back by having the Illusive Man run Cerberus in *ME2*. As a proponent of humanity at any cost, he was meant to exemplify the best and worst of humanity.

MW: From start to finish I'd probably go with the Illusive Man. The mystery, the arrogance, the power and constant double-guessing made writing the Illusive Man as entertaining as playing alongside him. Working with Martin Sheen was an obvious perk too.
What would he be doing now? Controlling the Reapers. And celebrating with a smoke and the oldest brandy still in existence.

PW: Wrex. I love his personality, his gameplay and his role. It was one of the reasons I wanted him as a fully playable squad mate in the *Citadel* pack.
What would he be doing now? Discovering the joys and perils of parenthood.

DE: I love Samara. She's noble, driven, wise, sexy, and has a very rich and heartbreaking backstory. Her "love story" with Shepard is subtle and tragic, and it's a bonus that her face model, Rana McAnear does Samara cosplay at many conventions.
What would she be doing now? Retaining and rebuilding Asari culture, as well as keeping opportunists in their place with a generous dose of justice.

MG: My favourite character has always been Hackett. He's bold, decisive, and a strong leader while Shepard is off saving the galaxy.
What would he be doing now? He'd be an admiral without a war. I imagine he'd be rebuilding, and in the early stages of planning a defence for the next threat...

"Writing the Illusive Man was as entertaining as playing alongside him"



#2// WOULD THE MASS EFFECT GAMES MAKE A GOOD LIVE-ACTION MOVIE? WHAT ACTORS WOULD MAKE A GREAT SHEPARD?

CH: I think *Mass Effect* would make an amazing live-action movie, on the strength of its characters and the human drama that's at the centre of a spectacular sci-fi universe. But making a great movie is easier said than done. We're currently working with Legendary Pictures to develop a movie, but we're taking our time to ensure that the quality is going to be there.

MW: Done correctly, it could be one of the most memorable movies I could ever imagine. I really liked the cropped-hair, scruffy version of Bradley Cooper in *Silver Linings Playbook*. He's definitely got the charisma to lead an eclectic band of soldiers and mercenaries across the galaxy.

DE: It would make a fantastic movie because it is a classic hero's journey. I think either Mark Meer or Jennifer Hale would make wonderful Shepards. They are both excellent physical actors as well great voice actors, and obviously they sound the part. Outside of them, I'd love to see Nathan Fillion as Shepard.



"So much more could be told in the *ME* universe"

#3// ARE THERE ANY SUBPLOTS OR NON-SHEPARD RELATIONSHIPS YOU WOULD'VE LOVED TO FLESH OUT MORE?

PW: I would love to see more information or action around the Asari Commandos or the N7 teams.

DE: On the Normandy, I always felt Dr. Chakwas was a mother figure and Engineer Adams was a father figure. In *ME3*, they have a deep friendship with hints of possibly more. I would have loved to see more of them together.

MG: I always thought it would have been cool for *Shepard and Kasumi* to go on another mission together. Kasumi has an interesting past, and achieves her goals in such an interesting way - it could have flourished into much more.

#4// WHICH CHARACTERS DO YOU THINK COULD STAR IN THEIR OWN SPIN-OFF SERIES?

CH: There's so much that could be told in the *Mass Effect* universe. It'd be cool to do something completely unrelated to the larger storyline, like a story about a private investigator on the Citadel. Or maybe something detailing *Garrus* time in C-Sec.

PW: That depends on the medium and character. I think a game centred on brutal *Krogan* combat with more of a melee focus could be pretty exciting.

MW: Aria. The Illusive Man. Kai Leng. Any henchman. The list goes on. I think most of them could have successful spin-offs of their own in some fashion.

DE: While being one of Shepard's most loyal friends, *Garrus* has also had some of the most driven personal goals. He's a hero in his own right, as Archangel and beyond. Who wouldn't want to see the further adventures of the bold, charming Garrus Valkarian (there's a lot of guns out there to calibrate).

MG: Following the story of Javik a little bit more would be pretty cool. As the last remaining member of a lost race, I think that we could tell a lot of stories about his adventures in the Milky Way, and coming to terms with his place in the new Galaxy.

#5// WHAT'S YOUR MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT?

PW: I think the day I remember most is the day I walked into the writing room and stated that Tali had to die if you chose the Geth at the end of the Quarian/Geth campaign. I was also insistent on her death having a dramatic interrupt and eventual twist for the player where they could not save her. I really love that moment.



Tali at her most seductive.

#6// WHO WAS YOUR FAVOURITE SHEP PAIRING IN THE GAME? IS THERE ANY OTHER CHARACTER THAT YOU THINK WOULD'VE MADE A GREAT ROMANTIC INTEREST?

PW: Liara was always my favourite love interest for Shepard. She was smart, sexy but not in an obvious way. It was the fact that she was a little innocent that really made her interesting as a companion.

MW: Garrus. Hands down. Obviously Aria T'Loak stands out as a character who could've enjoyed a tumultuous and entertaining romance with Shepard.

DE: Though the buildup to Samara's mini-love interest was a bit James Bond-esque (i.e. not much buildup), I found the resolution a refreshing twist, where you could see Samara desired Shepard intensely, but she needed to stay true to her responsibilities. I was very happy to see some resolution to that romance arc in the Citadel DLC.

As for a new romantic interest, Joker and Shepard have been through so much together, I could see them coupling up.

MG: My personal favourite was Miranda. It's really hard to predict what's going through Miranda's head, and with her history with Shepard, it makes for a great dynamic.



Suggested name: Krogan's Heroes.



#7// HAVE YOU READ ANY OF THE FAN FICTION? WHAT DID YOU THINK OF IT?

DE: Kelly Chambers and Steve Cortez were the two love interests I wrote, and I've always been interested in their fanfic. Many of those writers have impressed the heck out of me. They have nailed their motivations and manners of speech perfectly. I'm honoured and humbled that they live on in other stories while remaining the same people born from my imagination.

MG: There's definitely some great fan-fiction out there, but also some pretty surprising stuff. Most of it is probably not safe for work... I think fan-fiction (and fan art) showcases the dedication that our fans have to these characters (and in a lot of cases) the talent they have. It's humbling to be a source of inspiration for so many people!

"We've been impressed by the quality of the fan fiction"



"The series was much bigger and better than we could have expected"

#8// WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MOMENT?

PW: The death scene for Anderson is still one of my favourites of the entire trilogy. When I played that scene at home with my Shepard it was very powerful, and I have to admit I got a little choked up.

DE: I'm proud of the sequence in *Mass Effect 2* where you played as Joker during the Collector Assault on the Normandy. It was a great moment to see just how awesome Shepard is by contrasting it with someone who is just an average guy, not a super soldier. I love horror, and this sequence was like a haunted house ride at your state fair, and Seth Green's comedy works well even in tense scary moments.

MG: For me, a really powerful quote came from Garrus in *Mass Effect 3*. My relationship with Garrus was always pretty strong, but when he says to "Go out there and give them hell. You were born to do this". That really summed up the whole trilogy for me. Here, we have this character, a brother in arms, who has stood by my side for years. He realises (and so do I) that this might be a one-way mission, but the end is in sight, and that it's my sole purpose for pushing on. He really galvanized that in that statement.



#9// DID THE TRILOGY PAN OUT THE WAY YOU PLANNED?

CH: I think it achieved everything we thought we were aiming for, but the reality of it was much bigger and better than we could have expected. There was just no reference point when we started in 2004 for accurately visualising the kind of scenes we were capable of pulling off in *Mass Effect 3*, eight years later. We also couldn't have expected the degree of attachment that players would have with the characters. We knew we wanted to push digital acting and emotional, character-based storytelling - we just had no idea what it would eventually look like, and how effective it would be.



#10// ARE THERE ANY STORY ELEMENTS YOU WISH YOU COULD TAKE BACK?

MW: Killing any of the henchmen in *Mass Effect 2* made for some interesting challenges in *Mass Effect 3*. To be clear, I wouldn't take it back - I think what we accomplished in the end was amazing. But figuring the implications took about five years off my life.

DE: I wish I hadn't been so mean to Kelly Chambers in *Mass Effect 3*. After her hardships in *Mass Effect 2*, she still has so many ways to die in *ME3*.

"I wish we hadn't been so mean to Kelly Chambers in ME3"

#11// WHICH DEATH WAS THE TOUGHEST FOR THE TEAM TO HANDLE?

CH: Anderson was one of the best characters in the series. In some ways his character had a more personal relationship with Shepard than any other, starting before *ME1* and being a consistent father figure in all three games. I loved Keith David's performance - it made Anderson's death a powerful and sentimental moment.

MW: Anderson's death was a tough one to write. The VO session was even more emotional when we recorded it. Thane was debated a great deal, not so much whether we should kill him, but whether or not we should cure him.

CH: The death we probably discussed the most was *Mordin's*. It was unique in terms of the logistics around letting the player maintain a lie throughout the mission, and ultimately make a life and death choice, while giving the right moments to make decisions, revisit moral positions, and take actions that are appropriately foreshadowed.

MG: *Mordin* was the hardest for me. I think it was tough for the writers too...

PW: Tali's was the toughest death for me to plan. She was a foundation character that had been with the series from the start. Making it possible for her to die was something I felt needed to happen, given the circumstances.

DE: There have been only two gaming moments that have ever gotten a tear out of my eye, and *Thane's* deathbed was one of them.

#12// DID YOU HAVE ANY OTHER NON-COMBAT STUFF PLANNED, LIKE IN THE KASUMI DLC?

DE: In *ME2* we had a moment where the player took on the role of Joker during the Normandy assault. Similarly, we'd planned on having the player take on the role of a Quarian scientist before Tali's loyalty quest, and a colonist on Horizon during the Collector attack. It was a bit controversial to not be Shepard, and we thought it better to put the development energy into other places.

MG: Yeah, we always start with some fairly radical ideas when we're putting together a level or gameplay sequence. For many of these, what you see in the end product is a result of constant iteration and transformation of these ideas. In certain circumstances, we like to explore some of these ideas more in DLC. The car chase mission, in *Lair of the Shadow Broker*, was something new we'd wanted to try for some time, and found a perfect venue for it in that DLC.

DLC enabled small experiments.



#12// DID YOU EVER CONSIDER MAKING PARTY MEMBERS OUT OF ANY OF THE OTHER RACES?

CH: We knew some races would figure prominently in the storyline. So they had to function like the human characters, be able to carry a gun, etc. But we also wanted a sense of "other aliens" around the periphery - species that may eventually play a major role but are really there to suggest there's an exotic universe out there. For *ME1* we developed a set of additional aliens, that would mainly be featured in the Citadel. Each developed a bit of a following, so over the series we found ways to make them play more important roles.

DE: All party members needed to use a humanoid skeleton. If we'd ever tried to use a non-humanoid, the cost would have been huge. Instead, we took all the development effort that we could have put towards an odd squad mate and made a larger, more polished game.

#13// WHICH OPTIONAL CHARACTER DO YOU WISH HAD BEEN MANDATORY, SO THEY'D BE SEEN BY MORE PEOPLE?

CH: People not finding optional content is less of a concern than we originally thought. People seem to find all the content one way or another, either through replays, completionist gameplay, or talking with other players.

PW: I think Javik was by far my favourite DLC character.

MW: Zaeed was always a favourite of mine. He added age and wisdom, mixed with the brash attitude you could ever want. Robin's gravelly voice was the perfect match for Zaeed and one I could happily listen to all day.

MG: Kasumi. Again, she has an amazing history, and she has a very unique combat style about her.

#14// HOW DID THE MULTIPLAYER COME ABOUT?

CH: When we envisioned *Mass Effect*, it seemed like it would be fun to explore this new universe with a friend. With *ME1* and *ME2*, we tried to find a way to include some kind of multiplayer without it compromising the core experience, but we never found a good way to do it. We looked at co-op in the main story, where you could take control of squad members. But it didn't seem like anyone would want to be only a supporting player in someone else's game. We thought about some kind of PvP mode, but in *ME2* the conflict was on a very closed, secretive scale, and it didn't feel right. With *ME3*, the idea of an all-out galactic war allowed us to let players fight different facets of that war - in a way that complimented the experience as seen from Shepard's perspective. That helped us envision a way to let people play in the ME universe in a way that felt appropriate to the setting and story premise.



Online play was more fun than expected.





"The continuous character save was a challenge, but we don't regret it"

#15// DID THE "CONTINUOUS CHARACTER SAVE" ACROSS THE THREE GAMES WORK OUT AS YOU'D HOPED?

CH: I think it was something we had to do, if we were being serious about telling an interactive trilogy story. There's no point in having an interactive story if all players have exactly the same character and the same story variables at the end of each game.

PW: It was very challenging. While it really made your character feel like your own for the entire series, it also created a lot of extra work on our part. I think the biggest problem was that people actively stayed away from the series because they did not want to start in the middle. The ownership that the feature gave to the player was really special, however. Seeing decisions reflect all the way through the series to the end was great.

DE: A major design challenge is to give the player as much freedom full of meaningful choices without it spiralling out of control in complexity. Having save state flow through a trilogy just exacerbated that challenge.

MG: It was extremely difficult to execute. The amount of content we needed to create from a production standpoint was often enough for numerous games, and very few players would end up seeing all of what we had built. That said, we don't regret it at all, and feel it was fundamental to telling the story of the trilogy.

The aftermath has proved divisive.



#16// MUCH HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT MASS EFFECT 3'S ENDINGS. WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM IT? HAS YOUR OPINION CHANGED?

CH: One thing that really stood out for us is that we underestimated how attached people would become to the characters. An example of this is the Citadel DLC, which has hours of pure character interaction - hanging out at a party, chatting at a bar, etc. We'd never have imagined that as we ended the trilogy, all people would want to do was spend more time with the characters, sort of bathing in the afterglow - getting closure and just having some time to live in this universe that they fought to save. This, and many other learnings, will be built into our future games.

DE: It shows how invested a player is in the story, and how much they care about the outcomes. I've learned that a bitter-sweet ending is much easier to watch in a movie, than experience in a long RPG where the player is very invested in the protagonist.

MG: The primary take-away was never to underestimate the passion of your core fan-base. As a company, we've always tried to respond to our fan requests and try to create something special for them. We learned that since fans had spent three games with most of these characters, that their feelings about letting them go were just as strong as ours.

#17// AFTER SO MANY YEARS WORKING ON MASS EFFECT, WHAT'S THE THING YOU'LL MISS THE MOST?

CH: I'll miss the familiarity of going to work every day in a whole galaxy that we created. By the end it had become a universe that we knew as well as anything in the real world, and we knew exactly what kind of experiences we wanted to create and how to go about it. On the next *Mass Effect* game, we are starting fresh, imagining new ways for players to explore the *Mass Effect* universe. At the same time, we're developing a completely new fictional universe that will be the basis of a new generation of gameplay and storytelling. It's an exciting time.

PW: I'll miss the volume of good decisions that have been made that I can rely on. Success is comforting, and moving on to the unknown is scary. Luckily I don't have to miss my team from *Mass Effect*; a lot of them are working with me on my current project. Personal success is easy when you work for, and with, people who can teach you new ideas, and perspectives.

MW: I'll miss the people. We'll still see each other, and many of us will work together again. But the *Mass Effect* trilogy was something special, and taken as a whole, is unique in the entertainment world. We all knew it had a chance to be something remarkable, and that made working with everyone even more fulfilling - knowing we were working together to create something we would all be proud to say we were a part of.

DE: The Normandy has been a large part of my life for over eight years. It feels very strange letting that ol' bird go. Lucky for me though, I am still, or will soon be, working with mostly the same team again.

MG: I'm going to miss all the amazing voice talent that we were lucky enough to work with over the years. These folks are truly masters of their craft, and some of the best in the business. Regarding the team, we will all be working again together again very soon, so there won't be much to miss!

"We underestimated how attached people would become to the characters"



PREVIEWS

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"It's a platformer with no mercy and no soul, except for the one it'll suck from you"
With a name like *Cloudberry Kingdom*? Unlikely-ARGGHH, p68

>Info

Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer EA Canada
Players TBC
Co-op TBC

State of play

MUST BUY

Can't wait

Looking good

Shaping up

Awards watch

FIFA 14

Variety is EA's goal this season

It's the 92nd minute, I'm 1-0 up and have a corner - promotion is practically in the bag. Having risen through the leagues, my *FIFA 13* Ultimate Team is one win away from promotion to Division 2. I'm already smugly celebrating and fist-pumping during a cutscene.

But what's this? A hoofed clearance from the corner goes directly to one of the opposing strikers (again) - a five-foot-nothing speed merchant who races into the empty space our computer-controlled defenders are inexplicably leaving open. He equalises easily, leaving us in controller-throwing rage as we come to the horrible realisation that promotion is lost. It was a cheap goal, a nasty goal to concede, and a goal that played on the game's small but significant reliance on speed and its defenders' slack marking.

While *FIFA 13* is a game I've dumped hundreds of hours of my life into, it is

these moments that make me want to punch it square in its face. It's with great hope then that I find out, through a variety of tweaks, new animations and new features, that it's these cheap goals that EA is working to remove from its new offering. "We found that the game could be quite quickly backwards and forwards, and at times you could get those cheap goals," says producer Nick Channon. "That was something we wanted to reduce or remove from the game if we could. Football is generally played through midfield. Obviously you can bypass that with a long ball - which is still going to be the case in *FIFA 14* - but if you look at the modern game it's tighter, it's about spreading play from side to side. We wanted to bring those elements to the game and to use more variety."

Release
2013

Heavy touch

To help balance the effect of fast players there's the introduction of 'Variable First Touch'. This means that if you decide to launch into a sprint, the ball won't stick to your feet or keep moving a set distance away from you as you push it forward. The likes of Ronaldo and Messi will be able to maintain far more control of the ball, but others may take heavier or more inconsistent touches as they sprint - perhaps pushing the ball too far ahead and giving defenders a chance

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

If done right, 'Protect the Ball' has the potential to add new depth and realism to *FIFA*. Thinking about how your team matches up with the opposition for speed, skill and strength may have you rotating the squad far more than before. For instance, why play a speedy striker like Defoe if the opposition's lack of strength means you could bully them with Adebayor?

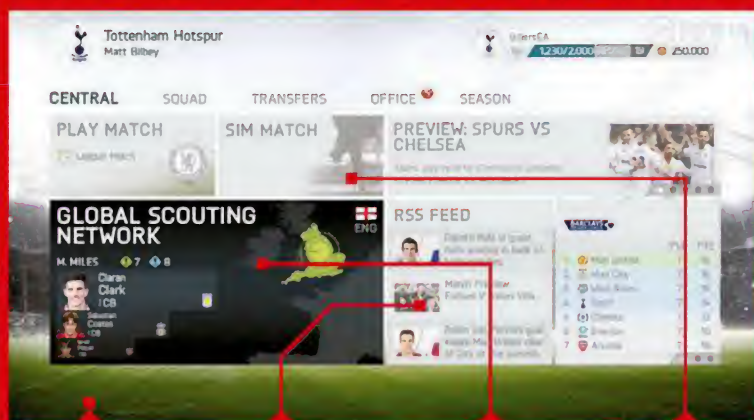
HAVE A DIG

New shot animations aren't just about adding realism, they're also designed to give visual feedback. In *FIFA 13*, sometimes shots could be limp or off target, but the shot animation was the same as if you'd hit the ball flawlessly. By adding new animations for rushed shots and the like, EA is giving players a better idea of why their efforts might not have been perfect.



CAREER MODE

WITH SO MANY NEW FEATURES TEASED THIS EARLY IN DEVELOPMENT, WE'VE HIGH HOPES THERE'S PLENTY MORE TO COME. HERE'S WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR



The new hub, while still a work in progress, looks to be a more intuitive way to get quick access to all the info about your team and the league.

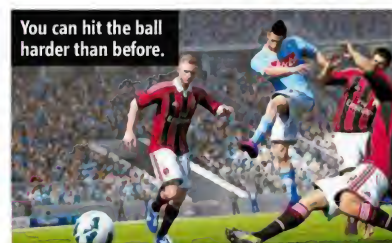
The news feed is smaller than last year, giving players a snapshot of goings on across the league at a glance, and not hogging the screen with out of date photos.

The new Global Scouting Network means more authenticity, with managers having to scout for players for longer to get an accurate idea of their attributes.

Boring emails won't interrupt your progress as you sim through Career mode. The sim will only stop for the most important correspondence.

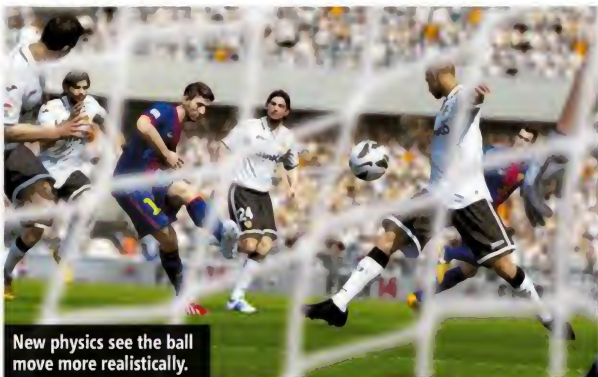
to take possession. It looks to be a promising and realistic way of evening out the series' love affair with speedy attackers. But those who like a pacey winger won't be void of options: EA has scrapped the long-established rule that meant sprinting players couldn't make sudden turns in any direction. Instead, sprinting players will now be allowed to move at any angle at any time, although the game will factor in their momentum.

But it's not just about running with the ball – running without it is just as important, and there are some promising improvements coming here, too. Attackers will now be able to check their run, or jog along the line of defence to create more dynamic runs and stay onside. Bigger strikers may instead ask for a ball into feet and back into defenders, allowing the Shola Ameobis of this world to use their strength to maintain possession or fashion chances.



You can hit the ball harder than before.

"Sprinting players will be able to move at any angle at any time"



New physics see the ball move more realistically.



EA wants to create a battle in midfield.

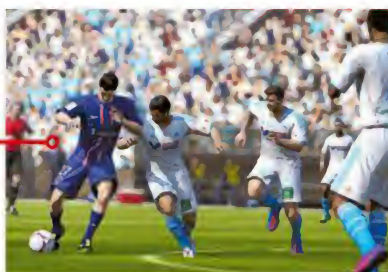


So far there's no button to bite a player's arm.

"It all speaks of adding a new level of depth and variety"

UNDER PRESSURE

The introduction of 'Dynamic Defensive Pressure' should have your whole team thinking about when to get tight on the opposition. The example EA showed had a midfielder on the ball getting increasingly isolated from the rest of his team. The opposing team realised he was in trouble, so they got tighter to the players they were marking, ensuring he couldn't easily pass his way out of trouble.



The most realistic socks you'll never wear.

In fact strength seems to have played a big part in EA's thinking this year, and it's keen to highlight a new feature that it calls 'Protect the Ball'. This takes *FIFA 13*'s clumsy shielding mechanic and tries to improve it, bringing it more central to the game and making it far easier to use. You'll be able to hold the left trigger to use the player's strength to keep possession and fight for loose balls, or tap it while dribbling to hold off defenders' more physical challenges. It looks like it could be one of the bigger changes to the on-field game, giving you more incentive to have stronger players in your squad and providing you with more options when trying to cut a defence into ribbons.

Finding balance

But good football games, like good tightrope walkers, are all about balance, and *FIFA 14*'s defences have also been given some extra tools to counter the new variety of attacking options. EA has tightened up the marking system and given the AI the ability to track runs more successfully. It's also introduced second-chance tackles, which will give defending players a small window of opportunity to stick out a leg after they've already committed to a tackle. Lastly there's 'Dynamic Defensive

Pressure', which will see team-mates recognising when to apply and relax pressure to the players they're marking.

The changes on both sides of the pitch are something that has the team at EA hopeful of a more satisfying, varied game, and one that will give players more control over the tempo of matches. "I don't want people to think it's harder," adds Channon. "It's just much more fun, having to build up the play a little bit. We know *FIFA 13* could be a little bit cheap at times – the way you could run through and score. Tightening things up makes you think a bit more and be a little bit more creative. We also had a lot of feedback saying *FIFA 13* felt fast.

We're not changing the game speed

but because the marking was loose you had more time to sprint."

The changes aren't all in the build-up play, however – shooting has been tweaked too. Players will now let off different shots according to their situation: they may have to dig a ball out of their feet, or rush their shot rather than getting a clean strike off. That doesn't mean your shot won't find the net, but the type of shot will depend on the context and how long you have to set yourself. Players will even open up their bodies to get better angles.

Striking the ball also gets more realistic with a reworking of *FIFA*'s ball physics. EA has reduced the amount of drag on the ball, and has paid more attention to how it travels – even taking into account turbulence. This means players can now hit the ball harder and unleash dipping and low-rising shots. The ball seems to move more realistically, making for some spectacular finishes and lofted curling through balls.

It all speaks of adding a new level of depth and variety to equip players with the tools to score and take possession in new ways. There's plenty more to come from EA in terms of announcements, but this first glimpse certainly gives me hope that football fans will once again have plenty to cheer about.

Richard Meade

SKILL GAMES

More than 2.2 billion Skill Games have been played on *FIFA 13* since it was released. These are back in *FIFA 14*, with new ones added and others refreshed. Examples include a striking game where players hit a line of balls at the goal one at a time, and a classic "keep the ball" game where seven players attempt to hold on to the ball against four defenders in a small section of the pitch.





LEGO Marvel Super Heroes

Over 100 characters assemble for a brawl in NYC

In 2013 there'll be six LEGO games out. That's a new record – just pipping the joint previous bests of 2000 and 2011, which saw five games apiece. And yet, the insidious LEGOification of all pop culture is still feeling inexplicably fresh. One day we'll all wake up as sassy brick parodies of ourselves. And you know what? It'll feel great.

Perhaps it's the way TT Games sucks all the characters into its affectionate alternate universe parodies. For example, if you don't raise a reluctant, despite-yourself smile at Hulk's out-of-character "Hulk not like walls. Walls keep people

apart" lines, then we're afraid it's too late to save you, you're already dead.

The Silver Surfer has appeared over New York. And where the Silver Surfer appears, his planet-devouring god-boss Galactus is never far behind. But the Surfer's board gets broken, showering the world with Cosmic Bricks, which sets off a city-wide villain rush. It's the tenuous LEGO-related excuse TT needs to get over a hundred supers, mutants, and demi-gods onto the streets at once.

The opening stage offers a tiny slice of that roster. Spider-Man, Hulk and Iron Man are pitted against Sandman and Abomination. Hulk and Abomination are Big Figs, oversized giants who can pluck bricks out of the ground. When they fight, it's a cutesy QTE battle in which Hulk makes Abomination punch himself with his own hands. The game will

be filled with these natural matches: a battle between Wolverine and Sabretooth isn't explicitly confirmed, because the PR machine isn't ready to utter the word yet. But when you say "Wolverine" and "natural match", the crowd screams "Sabretooth".

But it's also about having all the characters – all the Iron Man suits, all the Spideys – come up against characters they'd never normally meet. The outsider LEGO universe adds a level of casual, non-canon flexibility, while still touching all the fan service hot spots.

The opening missions reintroduce us all to the LEGO traditions of interacting with everything, demolishing and rebuilding objects to progress and uncover the densely-packed secrets. After that, the city opens up, presenting an explorable New York peppered with optional events, and buildings that Marvel buffs will recognise and want to explore. While we're perfectly open to the prospect of getting bored with the abject lovable charm of LEGO games at some point in the future, we get the feeling it won't be this game that does it. Hurry up and assemble, guys.

Jon Blyth

SENSE AND SCALABILITY

In some LEGO games, there's not much difference between the characters. Here, no two powers seem alike. Getting some of the more unusual characters to fit into the rules of the game world was one of the bigger challenges. According to developer TT Games, this is the most combat-based LEGO game yet, but if you can't have a laugh while you're lobbing trucks around, what's the point?





BRUCIE BONUS

Every character has a more distinctive set of powers. Iron Man can fly or walk and set off a series of locked-on missiles. Spider-Man can use his webs to incapacitate bad guys or swing around levels. Hulk can swap at will from his Big Fig form into Bruce Banner, who can use his scientist's brain to build a water cannon out of scrap tiles. Useful when fighting a Sandman who won't stop making puns about hands.

"This is the most combat-based LEGO game yet"



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Publisher
Nordic Games
Developer The Farm 51
Players 1
Co-op None

State of play

Must buy:
Can't wait:
Looking good:
Shaping up:
Needs work:

Deadfall Adventures

Mummies...why did it have to be mummies...

Skeleton warriors dolled up in ceremonial garb. Pistols being dual-wielded against assorted frights in a deep, dark tomb.

Sprawling expanses of sun-soaked sand dunes. And in the midst of all this pulpy adventuring? The gravelly-voiced James Quatermain. Does that last name sound familiar? It should – according to *Deadfall Adventures* producer Arthur Falkowski, James is a “descendant” of Allan Quatermain, the fictional explorer popularised in a book series written in the late 1800s by Henry Rider Haggard.

“From the beginning, we wanted to make you feel like the hero in classic adventure movies,” says Falkowski. To do



this, developer Farm 51 will let you adjust the difficulty of both combat and puzzles. This way, he reasons, someone interested in embracing their inner thrill-seeker will be able to shoot and root through different locations, solving puzzles and stumbling on treasures – which are always held at arm's length by traps, riddles, or guardians – while meeker types can dial down both difficulty settings to simply “focus on the story.” To help you in your plight, an inventory stuffed with what Falkowski calls “real adventurer’s equipment” (such as a compass, treasure maps, and notepads) will be at your disposal when navigating the game’s dangerous territory. Expect lethal environmental hazards – though if you’re clever enough, you’ll be able to turn them against the uglies on your tail.

The team also struggled with employing a first-person perspective in puzzle-

solving scenarios – something that tends to be more wieldy in a third-person view, where you can more aptly position how your character interacts with objects and the environment. But the urge to keep you in Quatermain’s shoes helped the developer find a way to make it work. “It was a real challenge,” admits Falkowski. “But... looking from a first-person perspective on ancient reliefs... and trying to find a solution, gives you a feeling of real participation. You just feel like a hero.”

The ensuing shootouts and scraps with everything from garden-variety humans to more exotic, supernatural threats – including mummies and assorted mythical creatures – should only bolster that feeling. Or so we hope. Until we can try *Deadfall*’s puzzling ways for ourselves, we’ll hold off on making any grand declarations about its heady mix of exploration and action.

Francesca Reyes

Release
30 July

The classic plane crash in the middle of a jungle.



>Info

Publisher PQube
Developer Milestone
Players TBC
Co-op TBC

State of play

Must buy!

Can't wait!

Looking good!

Shaping up

Needs work!

INNER WORKINGS

What goes on under that carbon fibre shell? Not even Milestone knows. "It's like a military secret," Caletti tells us. Really? You'd have thought the official license might afford you some numbers and stats about the inner gubbins of a MotoGP bike? Again, Caletti retorts: "Really." The team did get to record each bike's engine sound at a special facility in Valencia though, audiophiles.

MotoGP 13

Two-wheeled sim leaves arcade stylings in its dust as it moves towards F1-style presentation

However bad you are at driving games, there's usually a good chance that you'll at least make it round the corner still strapped inside your car. But when dealing with the two-wheeled, 200+mph superbikes of *MotoGP 13*, remaining anywhere near your vehicle is far from a given.

Which is kind of the point. What Milestone's fastidious simulation of 1000cc heroism lacks in terms of license appeal (hands up who can name more than three MotoGP riders?) it wrestles back with meaty handling and something a bit different on race day. Game director Michele Caletti tells us the secret is in creating the sensation of "controlling the rider,

who controls the bike," rather than directly steering the vehicle itself.

Scepticism's due after a few rosey Capcom contributions to the franchise, but we're pleased to see Milestone bring back believable physics, a sense of rider weight, and a level of challenge that flings you onto the gravel plenty, but also gives feedback as to why you're eating dirt. Hit the throttle too early or don't lean forwards when straightening up, and you'll know about it. And if the resultant skid marks and broken fingers look like they'll cost you the race, you can always hit rewind. Milestone has created a version of the flashback feature from Codies' *F1* games, which allows the team to keep the riding as realistic as possible with that safety net in place.

You can make minute adjustments with a steering wheel mid-turn, but changing your corner arc on a bike requires shifting your whole body. As such, it's important to pick a braking point, turn in at the right moment and stick to it. Milestone's gone to some lengths to make everything feel believable, mo-capping real riders as they lean in and out of corners and wrestle the bike into a smooth exit. Think Black Bean's *SBK Generations*, but with graphics from this decade. The whole shebang's running on a modified version of the *WRC 3* engine and, while the trackside details could be richer, the bikes and riders themselves are as arresting as neon death machines covered in giant sponsor logos were designed to be in the first place.

Release
June

"The secret is in making you feel like you're controlling the rider rather than the bike"

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Jorge Lorenzo, the 26-year-old double world champion will be your chief adversary whether you choose the 2013 or the strongly hinted-at 2012 championship. The build we played featured bikes and riders from both seasons, while Caletti neither confirmed nor denied 2012's official inclusion. There was no MotoGP game last season, so the year-old leathers will be a big draw to hardcore petrol heads.

Presentation is an oddity. Milestone wants to ape TV coverage as much as possible, using the same track intro videos they use on telly and mimicking the overlays. Gavin Emmett, the BBC red button commentator, is even present to introduce tracks and sign off race coverage. But when the racing begins, it's all about seeing the race through the driver's eyes. That means stepping into the team garage in first person, again a la Codemasters, hitting the track in helmet-cam and hearing none of Emmett's punditry. It's an odd mix we're not completely convinced by yet, but it shouldn't discourage you from saddling up to find out if you can make it round the track just once without coming off.

Adam Glick

TAKE A BRAKE

On higher levels of simulation, you control the brakes independently. Crikey, right? It's initially tricky to get the hang of, especially considering that you're also in charge of 'tucking in' the rider on straights with Y. But it's worth the teething pains not only to gain the ability to pull stoppies by slamming on only the front brake on a straight, but for balancing the bike around corners too.


METAL MASTER

This chap in the background is Master Kazuhira Miller. After meeting Big Boss in Colombia, Kaz became second-in-command of the Militaires San Frontières in the seventies and later, FOXHOUND's survival trainer during the nineties. It's likely he'll play a sizeable role in both *Ground Zeroes* and *The Phantom Pain* - perhaps he'll help Big Boss set up their hinted-at new home, 'Diamond Dogs.'

Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

Big Boss is snaking his way back onto our consoles

After a lengthy and frankly bizarre marketing campaign that fooled precisely no one, *Metal Gear* series creator Hideo Kojima finally saw fit to announce *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* during his talk at the Game Developer's Conference in San Francisco in March.

What little we've seen of the game so far begs more questions than it actually answers, and firm details are still thin on the ground. Kojima has described *The Phantom Pain* as an open-world game that will offer a lot of freedom to the player, but whether that translates to more gameplay and less of Kojima's own special brand of bum-numbing cutscenes remains to be seen.

Release
TBC

What we do know is that *The Phantom Pain* begins with soldier-turned-mercenary Big Boss - star of *Metal Gear Solid 3* and *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* - waking up in a hospital bed after spending nine years in a coma. He's immediately greeted by a mysterious bandaged man calling himself Ishmael, who claims he has been watching over the inert former operative for almost a decade. The two make a break from the facility, a feat made all the more difficult by the fact that Big Boss, formerly codenamed Naked Snake, is still trying to regain mobility in his atrophied limbs.

Whilst escaping, they come across a series of surreal sights: a figure resembling *Metal Gear Solid 1*'s Psycho Mantis appears whilst they are waiting for a lift; a silhouette not unlike *Metal*

Gear Solid 3's Volgin marches threateningly out of a hallway on fire; a flaming unicorn chases them as they escape the building on horseback. While these could act as call-backs to earlier *Metal Gear Solid* games, they're thought by many to be hints that Big Boss is in fact suffering from some sort of hallucinogenic or VR-induced nightmare. Virtual reality training missions have been touched upon in other *Metal Gear Solid* games, and the boundaries between fantasy and reality are

"Is Big Boss suffering from some sort of VR-induced nightmare?"

Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

UP IN FLAMES

During their escape from the hospital, Big Boss and Ishmael are chased by several ghostly figures, witness a huge, shadowy whale KO a helicopter, and are pursued by an otherworldly flaming unicorn while riding a white horse. The significance of the whale is anyone's guess, but fans concede that the white horse could be a reference to the one owned by Big Boss/Naked Snake's former mentor The Boss.



Info

Developer
Kojima Productions
Publisher Konami
Players 1
Co-op TBC

State of play

Must buy
Can't wait
Looking good
Shaping up
Needs work

TOUCH BASE

Going from the established MGS timeline, it's likely that *The Phantom Pain* takes place in the early to mid eighties. We see an off-shore structure similar to Mother Base, the HQ of Big Boss' Militaires Sans Frontières mercenary group, being destroyed while its troops try to escape. If you played *MGS: Peace Walker*, which takes place in 1974, you may remember staffing and refurbishing Mother Base yourself.



This burned man could prove significant.



Cool guys don't look at explosions.

something Kojima seems quite keen to explore, so this is a theory that could well work out later on down the line.

Although *The Phantom Pain* and previously-announced *Metal Gear Solid: Ground Zeroes* were originally believed to be the same game, Kojima has since explained that the former will be the meaty, officially numbered entry to the series, whilst *Ground Zeroes* will act as a smaller-scale prequel, taking place nine years prior to the events of *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes*. *Ground Zeroes* will be released in the run up to *The Phantom Pain*, serving as an introduction to the main event and presumably bridging the gap between earlier entries to the series, explaining how Big Boss ends up in his coma and setting up the events to come. Is Big Boss still in a dream? Only time will tell.

Aoife Wilson



The mid-life crisis eyepatch was cute – this is ridiculous.

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JUDGMENT



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Microsoft



Microsoft
Studios

XBOX
LIVE

XBOX 360.

Jump in.

> Info

Publisher Bethesda
Developer
Tango Gameworks
Players TBC
Co-op TBC

State of play

Must buy

Can't wait

Looking good

Shaping up

Needs work

The Evil Within

Resident Evil creator's mysterious Project Zwei is revealed

This is a reason to get excited, so please, start vibrating your thighs in anticipation. When Shinji Mikami, the creator of *Resident Evil* and grandfather of survival horror, announces a game, you put up with gameplay-free live-action teaser trailers. You even put up with a video from Bethesda's account teasing that teaser. You put up with it, because you want this to be the return of survival horror. The last time Mikami went there, remember, *Resident Evil 4* happened.

The announcement by Bethesda and Mikami is about the title we've previously reported as 'Project Zwei'. The website, decorated with atmospheric collages and pencil sketches, gave no clue to the game's

story, but promised that it would be a "true" survival horror game.

Story is now emerging: detectives investigating a mass murder encounter a dark and powerful force, and our hero, Sebastian, witnesses the deaths of his fellow officers before passing out. He wakes up in a world of monsters and cruel machinery, of death and madness. We're given some clue to the monsters: there's an apron-wearing brute with a spiked hammer and a box in place of a head - a box that appears to be full of ejectable gut-tentacles. There's also a skittering four-armed creature that conjures itself out of a puddle of blood,

and a faceless beast with shards of glass jammed into every part of his body.

It's like character design of *Hellraiser* and *Silent Hill*, and low-fi brutality of *Texas Chainsaw*. But it's also the mental trauma of *Eternal Darkness*. The world shifts and warps in response to your actions. "Hallways, walls, doors, rooms, buildings and nature" will all distort - but is it an unreliable narrator, or an unreliable world?

According to a translated write-up in Japanese mag *Famitsu*, there is a "bliss" in the game that comes from getting unwillingly sucked in and conquering your fears. Fair play to Tango Gameworks - this all feels intensely strange.

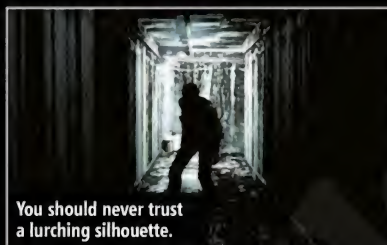
The Evil Within will be released in 2014, and Shinji Mikami is on the record as saying it's the last game he'll direct. That could be marketing spin, of course, but we like to think he'll reinvent survival horror one last time, shout "that's how you do it, you idiots," flip us all a bird, then jump into space.

Jon Blyth

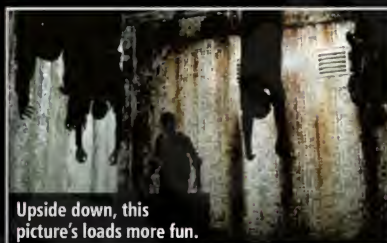
Release
2014



Gut-Box head: the new Pyramid Head?



You should never trust a lurching silhouette.



Upside down, this picture's loads more fun.



The moral: don't do your make-up on the train.

Publisher Ubisoft
Developer Vector Cell
Players 1
Co-op None

State of play

Must buy

Can't wait

Adding to

Shopping up

Need to work

Flashback

Now you can fight for your identity in HD

If Mega Drive classic *Flashback* was a sandwich (and let's face it, everything is) it's one slice *Running Man*, one slice *Total Recall*. Lift up that top slice, and you'll find an inch-thick crab paste filling that, on closer inspection, turns out to be the original *Prince of Persia*. Paul Cuisset was the guy who built this lovingly-remembered blend of mind-wipe sci-fi and platforming. He's also involved with the 2013 version, which definitely isn't an HD remake of the original.

"It's the game that was in Paul's head when he made the first game," says co-writer Simon McKenzie. If you've read

any previews of remakes before, you'll know what's coming next – it's the cliché that can never not be said. "Now, we've got the technology to realise that vision."

It's a retelling of the same story, though – protagonist Conrad escapes from a couple of oddly genitally-faced cyborgs, crash-landing his speeder into forests owned by the Titan Corporation. When he comes to, his memory has to be pieced together from R2-D2-style Holocube messages he'd left for himself. Turns out he has to go to Washington to find Ian. Now there's a killer sci-fi name: "Ian".

A few minutes' play confirms that this isn't just a graphical upgrade. There's more Metroidvania in the weapon upgrades. Find a gun, and you can fire through fences. Discover the charged shot, and deploy a charge that'll get you through rock piles.

TURRET OF TERMINATION

The Death Tower is the classic parody of "where TV is going". From *The Running Man* and *Battle Royale*, to *The Hunger Games* and *Black Mirror*, it's a theme that's been going on since TV moved into our homes. The deal here? Survive the tower and win a first class ticket to Earth. That's where the awesomely-named Ian is, so without money or an identity, the Death Tower looks like your only shot.

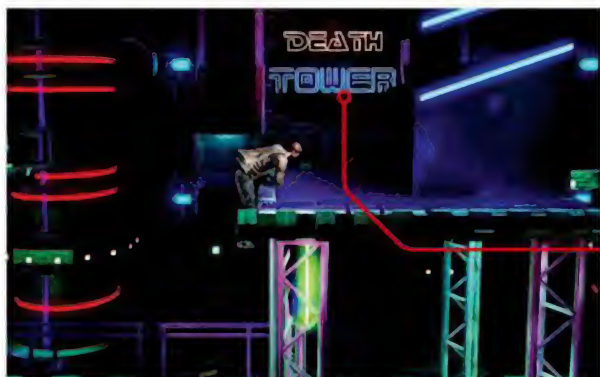
Release
2013

The controls have been modernised to suit a controller with more than just a D-pad and three buttons. The 2013 version of *Flashback* takes a lead from *Shadow Complex*, giving independent control of your gun aim to the right thumbstick. We're all hungry for a *Shadow Complex* sequel, and with Chair Entertainment silent on that front, this could be the methadone we're after.

Your upgraded weapons give the robotic minions of the Titan corporation the chance to be a bit more mobile and aggressive. Out go those trundling boxes with their retractable gun nozzles. In come the flying spheres that'll explode at your feet in a final act of pre-programmed defiance.

Any concerns? Maybe the old-school *Prince of Persia* approach to platforming can feel a little bit unresponsive at times, which is fine when you're exploring new areas – but we found the puzzles in the first half-hour or so to be pretty back-and-forth. You get less tolerant of finicky controls when you're re-treading old ground. But as an upgraded nostalgia hit with a solid story that's been lifted straight out of the 1980s, this is spot on. And there's always room in our hearts for a Death Tower.

Jon Blyth



Upgraded weapons join the upgraded graphics.



2013. It needs a '90s game with '80s inspirations.



Why not make out with the tiny glowing holo-you?



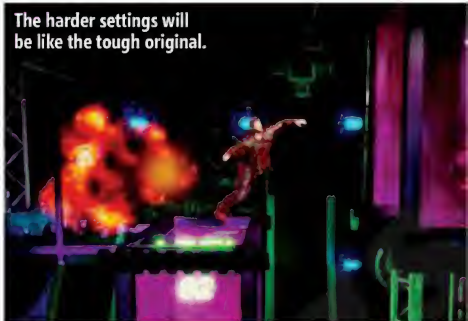
Cutscenes aside, it's a side-on platformer.

DANGLE SHOT

Like the first *Prince of Persia*, the animation was one of the original *Flashback*'s biggest draws. We'd been weaned on sprites with a few frames of animation. The idea that you could not only have realistic running animations, but dangle from a ledge, was revolutionary. It's not quite the same masterclass in 2013, but then again, you couldn't use a gun while you were dangling back in 1992. Your move, history.



The harder settings will be like the tough original.



RESPECT YOUR ELDERS

Some parts of the game are obviously designed to plug directly into the old nostalgia circuits. The opening screen is an animated version of that original static classic, and the opening cinematic is a buffed-up retelling of the scooter chase that leaves Conrad stranded in the forest. So yes, it's different - you don't get new writers unless you're writing new stuff. But there are strong cords of homage holding it in place.

Charge shot - great for blowing up rocks, humans.



Info

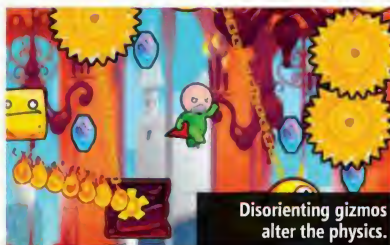
Publisher Ubisoft
Developer Pwnie Studios
Players 1-4
Co-op 1-4 players

State of play

Must buy
Can't wait
Looking good
Shipping up
Needs work



There's always a way.
Finding it's the thing.



Disorienting gizmos
alter the physics.



It's not meant to be easy.
And it really, really, isn't.

Cloudberry Kingdom

Buckle up for a whimsical traipse through hell on earth

From the title alone, this sounds like a terrible, sickly-sweet Facebook game designed to snare unsuspecting mothers.

Cloudberry Kingdom is nothing like a Facebook game. It's a platformer so pure-bred that it's gone boss-eyed from in-breeding. It's a platformer with no mercy, and no soul except for the one it'll suck from you. Its big trick? Randomly generated levels. You choose from five difficulties, and the system spits out an appropriately evil level.

Cloudberry Kingdom began life on crowdfunding site Kickstarter, with 640 people pledging enough money to comfortably surpass the \$20k target.



Screenshot included for poignant melancholy.

Challenging platformers can be compelling – ask any *Trials Evolution* victim – but *Cloudberry Kingdom* outdoes itself as a totem of bastardry.

The first 20 levels are fine: jumping from one easily-reached platform to the next, collecting the green gems for the perfect bonus. Instead of the laser-focused brutality of *Super Meat Boy*, *Cloudberry* throws gimmick after gimmick at you, forcing you to learn a new physics trick (jetpack, double-jump, getting strapped to a wheel?), only to pluck it away and replace it with another.

By the time you get to the cave levels, the jumps are tough, and you're desperately looking for the fraction of a second where you're able to slip unmaimed through dozens of swinging spiked balls. Ghost platforms will fade out, which sounds annoying – but you're glad of any clue as to how to time it. By the time we play Level

242 on Masochist mode, there's a sense that if you gave this ostensibly cute game a knife, it'd slash your chest open with a totally blank look on its face. It has us perching on the safe pixel at the brink of a deadly spiked platform, trying to keep our feet above the constant Mexican wave of Chinese dragons surging from the bottom of the screen. Forget a perfect gem run. If you survive this, you're a god.

There's a cutesy story told in a papercraft style in the interim. It's a strange tale of heroism, a damsel who doesn't appear to be in any distress at all, and the kind of lemon-sucking wordplay that would have been rejected from early episodes of *Power Rangers*. It looks great, even if the script's oddly twee. Are we ready for an infinite number of tough levels? We're not sure, yet. We'll have to let you know after we've pulled the rest of our hair out.

Jon Blyth

For illustration purposes only. If you touched that thing in the game, you'd be totally dead.



"Its big trick? Levels that are randomly generated"

Microsoft

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 **XBOX 360.**

KINECT

REVIEWS

The ultimate buyers' guide – the best Xbox 360 games

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» Details



Released
OUT
NOW

Publisher
Warner Bros
Developer
NetherRealm Studios
Price £39.99
Players 1-8
Co-op None

Injustice: Gods Among Us

Get over here – DC heroes are in for a pummeling

Reviewer



Aoife Wilson
OXM Aoife

Comic book fans have seen it all. In DC's 80-year history, we've witnessed Earth's salvation too many times to count. We were there when superheroes skipped multiple dimensions in search of fresh fights, and we've seen punches thrown so hard they've shattered reality. Yet despite such rich, violent, colourful source material, few games have captured the excitement, devastation and spectacle of a city-spanning brawl between metahumans, and fewer still put that power in our hands. *Injustice: Gods Among Us* wants to fix that.

In another dimension, Superman is tricked by Joker into killing his beloved Lois and destroying Metropolis. His faith and ties to humanity irrevocably broken, Kal-El decides his kid gloves must come off and trades them in for an iron fist, establishing the 'One Earth' regime and forcing his superpowered contemporaries to either conform or die. His actions spur alternate-dimension Batman into a truce with alternate-dimension Luthor, and together the unlikely duo bring heroes from 'our' DC universe into theirs in a bid to end Supes' totalitarian reign. Such an elaborate storyline seems extraordinary for a brawler, but it won't come as a surprise to anyone who played NetherRealm's 2011 *Mortal Kombat* reboot; a game that went to great lengths to weave a compelling tale between its impromptu eviscerations.

The basics of battle are also borrowed wholesale from *MK*; opponents go cape to cowl on a 2D plane, mixing a combination of light, medium and heavy attacks with unique

THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?
Superheroes from the DCU in a big-scale brawler.

What's it like?
Mortal Kombat, but with fewer fatalities.

Who's it for?
Comic book buffs first, fighting fans second.

"It so shamelessly steals from its source material that you can't help but laugh at the results"

Blood Dragon's got love for you if you were born in the '80s, p89



Did you know?

THE MAGIC PILL

The obvious power imbalance in *Injustice*, which has caused many fans sleepless nights, is explained away with a pill that increases the strength and durability of weaker characters by several thousand per cent. Seems legit.



Deathstroke is shocked by a surprise cuddle.

"Even if you're on the losing end you'll still enjoy the spectacle"

character traits, grabs and Super Moves. The controls feel slightly slow and weighty compared to other brawlers, but the upside is you'll feel the bone-fracturing force behind every brutal blow – making even basic combos grimly satisfying. As with *MK*, you're going to have to spend time studying and restudying the move list if you want to master each individual character and build customised combos. Beyond basic attacks, unique traits perform a variety of functions in keeping with each character's modus operandi; Batman can summon remote

gadgets to attack from afar whilst Supes can temporarily boost his strength. Other characters, however, possess more elusive unique moves. The Joker's, for example, requires a successful parry to activate, and so he's probably best saved for after you've had a bit more practice with the controls.

Mass destruction

The enticingly titled Super Moves are lengthy, extravagant attacks executed by building up a character's meter. Dealing a large amount of damage, these moves

require no input once activated, so when you've got at least two to a fight to sit through, they break up the action a little more than is necessary. Once they outstay their welcome, you can choose instead to sacrifice portions of the Super Move meter for a Clash wager. During these, each player secretly chooses how much of their meter to spend, and whichever opponent can afford the most will either regenerate health or deal extra damage. It's an opportunistic feature that won't endear itself to more tactical players, but casual users and those with a flair for the theatrical will get a kick out of a wager's ability to turn the tide of a match at any given moment.

Injustice's battles are gifted a final layer of complexity with interactive scenery. Dotted throughout each backdrop are a variety of objects for opponents to use and abuse. Each require a single contextual button press to engage, but different characters may use the same prop in varying ways.

XBOX LIVE

Injustice packs a wealth of online modes and features. Watch others fight, join a room with other beginners, tangle with King of the Hill and Survivor modes, or just tussle in a series of standard 1v1s.



Green Arrow performs an archery-free attack.



Unsurprisingly, this didn't end well for Hal.



"I love the smell of bazookas in the morning."



Supes looking the part of a big blue boy scout.



Lightning beats archery, every single time.

THE B-LIST



It's all too easy to focus on the big boys – who didn't steal mum's washing and pretend to be Superman when they were a kid – but don't forget to try out the lesser-known DC heroes, many of whom are making their gaming debuts with *Injustice*. Black Adam, Ares and Raven all have their own individual strengths, but it's Atlantean Aquaman who thoroughly steals the show. He's one of the most beginner-friendly fighters in the game, so be sure to give him a try – if only for his kick-ass trident.



The former Boy Wonder lays the smackdown.

A stone statue that a lightweight character like Nightwing might use to vault off, for example, will simply be smashed over someone's head by a hulking heavy hitter like Doomsday. There's a special satisfaction reserved for smacking a big red button to catch your opponent in the blaze of the Batmobile's boosters, but most of the interactive sequences are so outrageous that it's hard not to enjoy the spectacle even when you're on the losing end.

By far the best thing about destructive scenery is that it recognises and acknowledges the appeal and allure of playing as a DC hero as opposed to other more established fighters. If Superman and Doomsday were to duke it out on a street corner of Metropolis, the earth itself would shake and buildings would crumble. *Injustice* captures the insanity of these spectacular scenes and revels in their ridiculousness.

In addition to the story, *Injustice*'s single-player also offers a traditional arcade experience with ladder Battle modes. Classic unlocks individual character endings upon completion, whilst other ladders provide alternate challenges, such as Poison mode, which saps health over time. S.T.A.R Labs is *Injustice*'s take on *Mortal*



Kombat's Tower mode, with 240 character-specific challenges ranging from handicapped fights, to first-person shootouts, to aggravating contextual button-mashing marathons. Be warned – Story mode also forces the occasional ham-fisted quicktime sequence on you too, which would require a still more outlandish alternative dimension to be considered in any way enjoyable.

Multiplayer consists of a bog-standard local Versus mode and a pleasantly meaty online package. Up to eight players can get together for a King of the Hill clash, where waiting participants can spectate and vote on the current fight. An online Survivor mode compliments this, or there's the option to show some muscle against a singular opponent in 1v1 battles. The ability to create and join rooms lets you get together with other beginners to show each other new

moves, and daily online challenges, where you can net a bit of extra XP, are a nice touch.

Injustice, at times, feels a little unsure of who it's targeting. Environmental hazards, combined with the Super Moves and Clash wagers, make it seem more like a showy spandex-clad pretender than a serious fighting game, and hardcore fight fans may suspect it's not worth getting good at when any old vigilante can show up and button bash their way to victory. But for fans of the DC universe, it's show-stopping fun – even if a lack of decent advanced tutorials keep the bats firmly separated from the boys, and the likelihood of extensive replay fairly slim. It's the game we deserve, if not the one we need right now.

DEATHSTROKE THE CHEAT

Several characters in the *Injustice* roster are gifted with long-range capabilities. Deadliest among these is Deathstroke, who can keep his distance by plugging foes full of bullets. This can often be abused in online matches by opportunistic assassins, so make sure to counter with stopping attacks like Killer Frost's Iceberg to shut those spammers down.

XBOX 360 VERDICT

- ✓ DCU characters captured well
- ✓ Combat feels powerful and weighty
- ✓ Solid online options
- ✗ Controls can be difficult to master
- ✗ Some mechanics feel gimmicky

THE SCORE
Great OTT fun, but the novelty soon wanes

7

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XBOX 360.

Jump in.



Released
OUT
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Publisher EA
Developer
Visceral Games
Price £39.99
Players 1-2
Co-op 1-2 players

Army of Two: The Devil's Cartel

Xbox's dumbest shooter somehow lowers the bar

Reviewer



Jon Hicks
OXMjonty

There is one good idea here. It is this: given that this inexplicably enduring cover-shooter franchise is built on meat-headed adoration of brutal violence, make the violence as flamboyant as possible. Make the buildings explode, and the enemies explode, and your

near-uniformly short-lived allies explode, and add a separate ability that when triggered enables walls and boxes to explode. In slow motion. Make it the equivalent of one of those action movies created around people who are better at bodybuilding than acting.

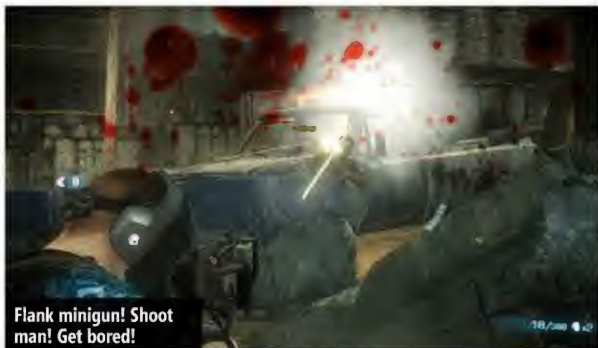
Had this brief been delivered with any enthusiasm, *The Devil's Cartel* could have been enjoyable. We know this, because the world already contains the equally idiotic but far more entertaining *50 Cent: Blood on the Sand*, which embraced its fundamental inanity and converted into a game of wit and creativity. But *The Devil's Cartel* is totally, bafflingly lacking in imagination; a third-person shooter that aims for nothing more than mechanical execution and fails to manage even that.

An unending stream of enemies charge towards you and your partner, spraying bullets and ducking behind cover. You spray bullets back, while attempting to use cover yourself. Enemies die, messily, often with

multiple limb loss. Sometimes there are stronger enemies that require more shooting. If you are downed, your partner can revive you. It's functional but nothing else, a weird white-label experience that leaves no impression on the memory.

Army of who?

The story manages to be worse than the previous games, which themselves ranked somewhere below Steven Seagal's oeuvre in narrative credibility. Prior dudebros Salem and Rios are relegated to support roles, and you're left to control new boys



Flank minigun! Shoot man! Get bored!

THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?
Bullet-spraying gun porn for two players.

What's it like?
An action movie that wouldn't even make it to DVD.

Who's it for?
Shooter fans who want to waste a weekend.



The smiley-face mask wasn't cheering him up.

"Problematically for a co-op shooter, the co-op's broken"

Army of Two: The Devil's Cartel



Did you know?

STAY FROSTY

This is the first (and based on its critical reception, possibly the last) *Army of Two* game to use DICE's Frostbite tech. It means fancier explosions and more efficient development, but all the Unreal-powered bling has been lost.



Shooting the red barrel went predictably.



Overkill is fun, and to be used at all times.

Alpha and Bravo, names and faces so generic you'd struggle to pull them out of a lineup otherwise composed of housecats. They have none of Salem and Rios' abilities to fake surrender, take hostages, or even fist bump: they can only run, shoot the endless hordes of enemies, and recite meatheaded dialogue that's genuinely remarkable for its total lack of charisma. It's as if somebody decided to build an action film around the goons rather than the hero.

The splode-happy Overkill mode is the only bright spot, a meter topped up by your kills that, when triggered, drops you into gold-tinted slow-motion invulnerability while granting you infinite and explosive ammo. It's generously issued and satisfying to use, and reducing your surroundings to rubble is the only time the game gets close to the guilty pleasures of its straight-to-DVD soulmates.

Problematically for a cover shooter, the cover system doesn't work properly. You're supposed to be able to identify cover and



Slo-mo breaching comes from the CoD playbook.

COOL SHOOTING, BRO

The highly elaborate gun customisation of the previous games is no longer available. Your earnings can be spent on new weapons, but customisation is restricted to basic colours and upgrades. You can also spend on picking out a new mask from an extensive and steadily-unlocked collection, or getting new clothing – including, bizarrely, the option to kit out your profane contract killer in official SkullCandy attire.



"It's like an action film built around the goons rather than the hero"

move forward to take it, but the positioning is erratic and confusing to interrupt. Taking cover manually is hit and miss, and moving between cover rarely works either. Generous hitpoint regeneration and the AI partner's handiness with a life-restoring syringe keeps you in play, while simultaneously removing any real challenge: the aim is score-chasing replays, but the experience is so dull few will bother.

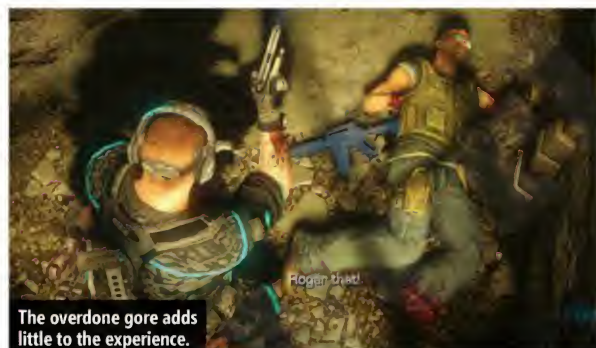
Problematically for a co-op shooter, the co-op doesn't work either. The mission restarts whenever the other player joins or leaves, which is maddening, and while the end-of-mission scoreboard rewards you for

playing smartly – extra points are awarded for drawing fire, surprising enemies and flanking – it rarely corresponds to your actions in-game, and you soon realise teamwork is unnecessary, whether you're playing with humans or not.

The sole selling point of *The Devil's Cartel* is the fact that you can blaze through it in a haze of blood and brick dust in the company of somebody else. It's not enough to justify spending more than a tenner on. After a day spent completing it, you're left only with a sense of emptiness and a lingering uncertainty as to whether it was created in circumstances of contempt or despair.

XBOX LIVE

There's online and offline co-op, of course, but it's not drop-in so you have to schedule play time with equally bored friends. Or just skip it entirely – the other online feature, leaderboards, reveal that most players haven't bothered.



The overdone gore adds little to the experience.

XBOX 360 VERDICT

- ✓ Passes the time
- ✓ Overkill mode is fun
- ✗ Relentlessly uninteresting
- ✗ Consistently glitchy
- ✗ Sub-Seagal dialogue

THE SCORE
Spectacle that has no soul

5

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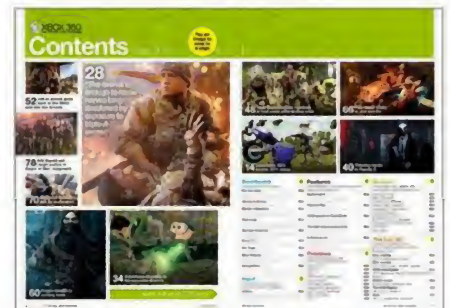
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Streaming video of exclusive gameplay footage



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Screenshot galleries for the biggest games



Cover disc not included. Internet connection required for streaming video

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Details



Released
OUT NOW

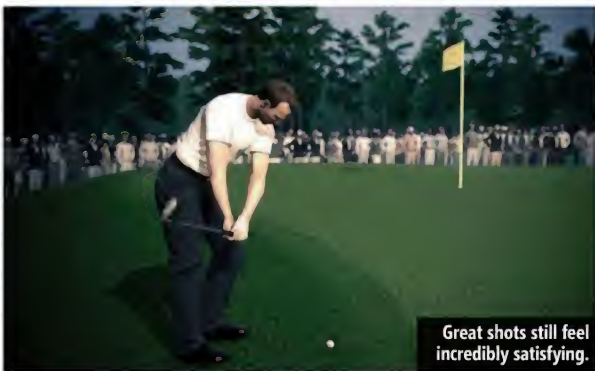
Publisher EA Sports
Developer EA Tiburon
Price £49.99
Players 1-4
Co-op None



Did you know?

CASH, MONEY, MILLIONAIRES

Tiger's racked up \$104,738,300 in PGA Tour career earnings alone, meaning he could afford to buy himself more than 2 million copies of the game. Reckon he could afford the DLC too.



Great shots still feel incredibly satisfying.



Personalised swings add to the realism.



EA gets all Hipstamatic with heavy use of sepia.

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14



Risin' up back on the street, did my time, took my chances

Reviewer



Richard Meade

KINECT PLAY

Tiger Woods' Kinect features won't appeal to any but the most casual of users. It still feels clunky, and while it's a slight improvement over last year, there aren't really any reasons to put down the joypad.

Tiger Woods games, like smartphones, are fine things, but unless there are some great new features it's difficult to justify buying a new one every year. Luckily the series has taken some neat steps forward lately and *PGA Tour 14* is one of the better offerings to date.

After last year's sickly-sweet hero-worshipping of Tiger's career, EA has slightly muted its teenie-bopper screams of admiration and shifted the focus to past legends of golf, giving praise to players like Seve Ballesteros and Arnold Palmer. The Legends of the Masters mode sees you go club-to-club with these golfing gods unlocking them as playable characters as you work your way through scenarios from different eras of the Masters. It's one of a few pleasing changes to a game

which is still just as smooth as ever but, for better or worse, never strays too far from its recognisable core.

Online Connected Tournaments stand out as the game's most enjoyable feature. The genius of the mode is in the way it can show more than 20 of your opponents' shot arcs playing out across the course as you're making your own attempt at the fairway or green. It ramps up the excitement and gives the game a tangible level of real-time competition that's often lacking, even in real life.

Driving forward

The success of Connected Tournaments and the new Quick Tournaments option, which allows you to swiftly play in one of golf's major competitions, will leave all but committed players with hardly any incentive to get into the game's Career mode, which by comparison feels long and grinding. However, it's not nearly as pointless as the option to play golf at any time of the day. Trudging around a golf course at night just makes you feel like you're a trespassing teenager who's had one too many J2Os and wants to steal all the flags.

The customisation options are once again very good, letting you create your own golfers as well as choosing their swing style. Fans of last year's *Country Clubs* will appreciate its improvements, and the golfing hardcore may be pleased with the inclusion of "Simulation" difficulty – though simultaneously annoyed by the number of extra courses already available as DLC. However, as with much of the game the enhancements outweigh the frustrations, and while it's by no means a revolution of the franchise, the improvements warrant fans giving it some course time.

THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?

Yet another new Tiger Woods PGA Tour game.

What's it like?

A decent yearly upgrade with a recognisable core.

Who's it for?

Fans of the franchise who wanted some more tweaks.

XBOX 360 VERDICT

- ✓ Connected Tournaments are great
- ✓ Play as and against legends
- ✓ Still satisfying to play
- ✗ Level of DLC will annoy some
- ✗ It's tweaks around the same core

THE SCORE
Tiger's come out swinging

8

Details



Defiance

A brave new transmedia franchise launches

Reviewer



Craig Owens

Defiance is a game. But it's also, simultaneously, a television show. American TV network NBC has pumped a lot of cash into this Western-feeling sci-fi franchise, in the hope that players will presumably play this *Defiance* game between episodes of the *Defiance* TV show while wearing their *Defiance* pyjamas and eating *Defiance*-branded food from their *Defiance* lunchboxes. The show and game are so closely entwined that we were sent a copy of the pilot along with our review copy.

We needed it, because the *Defiance* game doesn't do a particularly great job of

introducing you to its world. The idea is that sometime around the present day, a whole alien civilisation known as the Votan turns up on humanity's doorstep. Their solar system's been obliterated, you see, and they didn't realise Earth was already taken. Obviously, things turn a bit nasty and before you can say "post-apocalyptic setting", humanity and seven other war-weary alien species are trying to put conflict behind them in order to eke out a living on a terraformed Earth.

We know you aren't here for criticism on the TV show, so suffice it to say that we thought the *Defiance* pilot was perfectly *okay* if you're into the kind of science-fiction where badass heroes kick the extra-terrestrial asses of aliens that don't really seem that alien except for their prosthetics. Every now and then different

characters from the TV show will turn up in the game – so you can go "oh, it's *that* guy" and bathe in a comforting, reassuring glow of recognition.

Massive attack

On the Xbox, the most exciting thing about *Defiance* will be the fact this is an MMO – an entry ticket into a great big persistent world. Your adventures in *Defiance* take place alongside scores of other players, and there's a genuine thrill to turning up at the site of your most recent objective in order to discover a bunch of other players hunkered down, battling the mutant horde that you've been sent to exterminate. *Defiance*'s approach to co-operation is pretty straightforward: if you're near somebody else trying for the same

Did you know?

INTERRACIAL HARMONY

The alien civilisation in *Defiance* – the Votan – is actually composed of seven races. This should be perfectly suited to an MMO. You can only play as one of two species, however, and one of them is human.

XBOX LIVE

As an MMO, *Defiance* can't be played offline. Online you can play solo, group with other players, or take them on competitively in special modes. You can also trade items with others.



THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?

MMO shooter based on Syfy's brand new series.

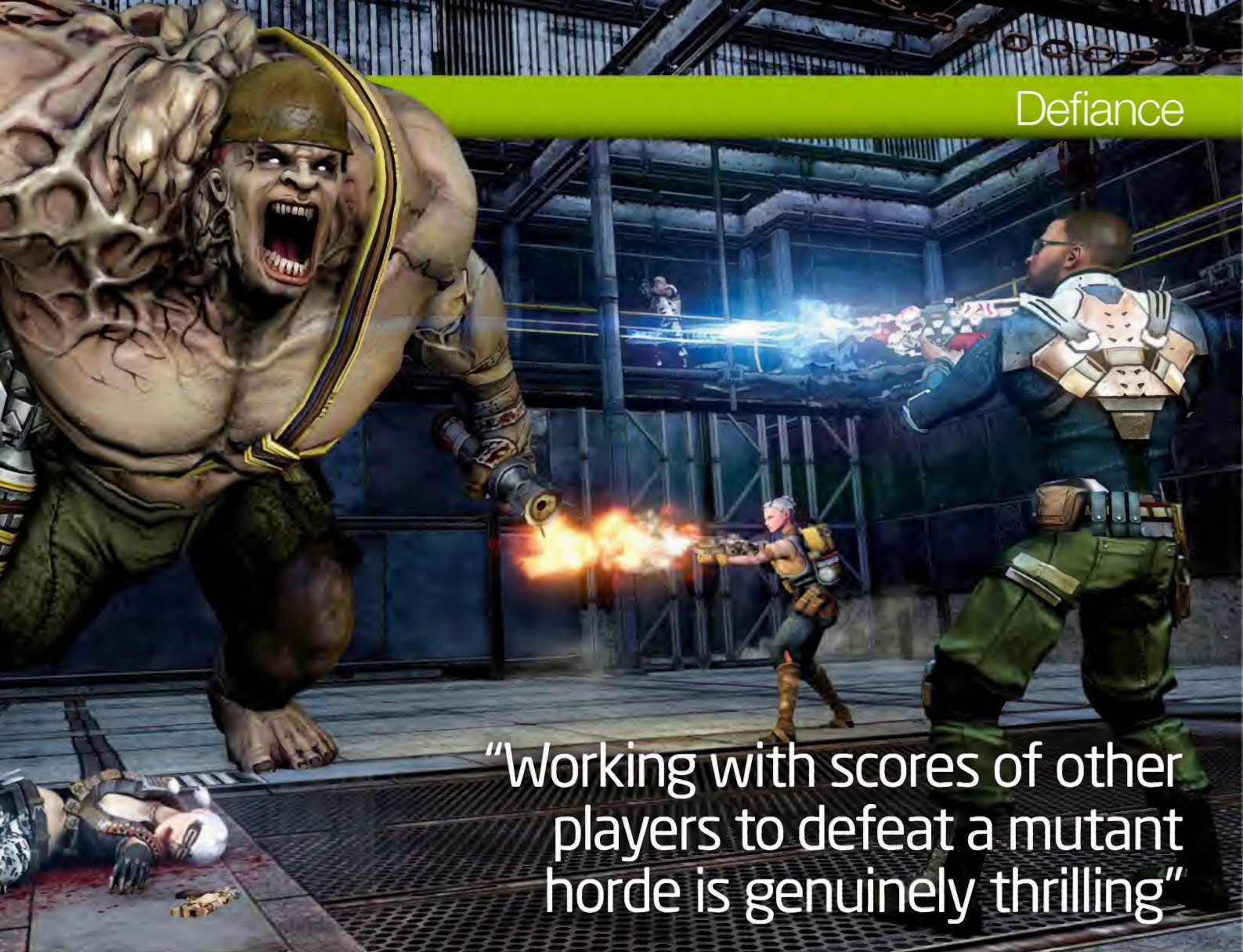
What's it like?

Third-person shooting in an open world.

Who's it for?

People who love MMOs but don't own a semi-decent PC.





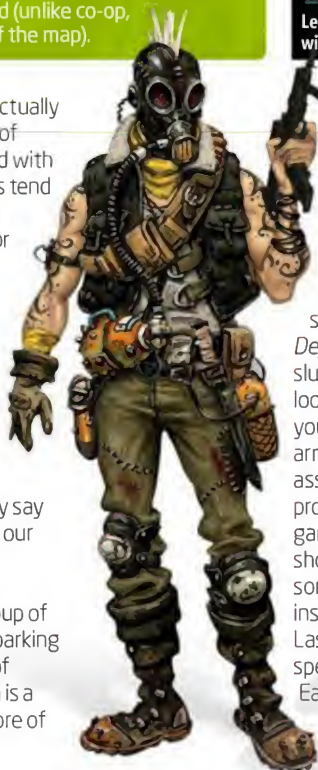
"Working with scores of other players to defeat a mutant horde is genuinely thrilling"

IN THE SHADOWS

Shadow Wars is *Defiance's* take on player versus player combat, and sees two teams fighting for control of alien tech. To enter, you need to join a queue via your D-pad – but we often had to wait up to 20 minutes before we could fight. The most interesting thing isn't the combat itself, however, but the fact that it takes place in the open world (unlike co-op, which is instanced and happens off the map).

objective, only one of you needs to actually complete the mission. It's a nice way of ensuring that you feel loosely aligned with anybody who wanders by, but it does tend to abolish the need for proper, actual teamwork. The same could be said for the class system – in that there isn't one. There's just a great big wall of upgrades and powers.

Still – you'll definitely feel some camaraderie during Arkfall events, massive player versus environment scums that take place when a piece of alien ship falls from the sky. These tend to attract the attention of anyone nearby – and we can safely say that we've never played anything on our Xbox 360s that felt quite so, well, massively multiplayer: when we and dozens of other players battled a group of mutants for a the rights to a giant, sparking piece of alien tech it was a moment of genuine togetherness. Co-operation is a theme of the TV show, and it's the core of



most MMOs. But in *Defiance* other players can often seem strangely unimportant – as if what you're playing isn't an MMO but in fact a massively simultaneous single-player game.

It doesn't really matter, because *Defiance* gets the basics wrong. The later *Mass Effects* and *Borderlands* successfully blended stats and guns, but *Defiance* reminds us of BioWare's sludgy-feeling first attempt – ordinary-looking enemies will soak up ammo like you're firing a water pistol and their armour's made of sponge, and that's assuming you don't come across the lag problems that blighted our time with the game. Not only does this spoil the shooting, it's hard to team up with someone when your new best friend insists on teleporting all over the screen. Lastly, the world of *Defiance* is singularly, spectacularly ugly. We appreciate that Earth's been terraformed beyond recognition – but who set the

A severe case of bleeding gums, there.



terraformers to "blurry; terrible water effects; mostly brown"?

There aren't any games like *Defiance* available on Xbox, and that's to its credit. And the thing about games like *Defiance* is that they can change and evolve over time – like the beasts prowling the forests of this brand new Earth. Still, *Defiance* has quite a few mutations to go before we can thoroughly recommend it.

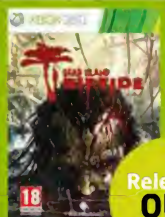
XBOX 360 VERDICT

- Look, it's him from the telly!
- An MMO on a console
- Not that much focus on co-operation
- Dull, treacly and unsatisfying combat
- Horribly brown and uninspired world

THE SCORE
Slightly broken but built on a solid MMO base

6

Details



Released
OUT
NOW

Publisher Deep Silver
Developer Techland
Price £39.99
Players 1-4
Co-op 1-4 players

Did you
know?

KNUCKLING DOWN

John Morgan's fisticuffs expertise was inspired by 'Fist of the Dead Star', a fan mod that added explosive force to *Dead Island*'s punches and kicks. Morgan's melee isn't quite as flamboyant, though we dig his flying kicks.

Dead Island Riptide

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...

Reviewer



Adam Glick

Dead Island, the videogame adaptation of the popular trailer, divided opinions like machetes divide zombie skulls. For every gushing advocate of Techland's head-stoving simulator, there was another screaming into their fist as the same action loop played out a million times to a backdrop of progress-blocking bugs and glitches. Well, prepare to gush or scream afresh, for *Riptide* is more of the same.

More an expansion in the *New Vegas* mould than an outright sequel, *Riptide* takes the four heroes from before, adds a punching expert to their ranks, and drops them on an island next to the original's Banoi. It's a case of out of the frying pan and into the same model of frying pan, the only difference being more

swampland – but when 'extra swamp' is your USP, you know you're in trouble.

To be fair, swamps do introduce motorboats, and on the off chance a zombie clings to the side, you get to dash them against rocks, which is pretty funny. Back on dry land, *Riptide*'s Big New Idea is a series of undercooked siege set-pieces. Waves of zombies storm your barricades, with options to place fences or landmines during the lulls. But the limited strategic options only serve to remind you how *Left 4 Dead* achieved more with much less faff.

Yawn of the dead

At least the game is friendlier to first-time zombie slayers. Characters start at a higher level, decked with colourful skills that avoid the tedious slog that opened the original. Indeed, the game cuts to the chase in most regards, handing guns and explosives in the first half-hour. Returning players also get to import their saved character, though this only serves to highlight how little has changed since they last stood in those shoes.

Repetition is *Riptide*'s greatest crime. Smaller alterations – such as AI characters levelling and slightly more resilient weaponry – are overshadowed by the sheer crushing boredom of the central action. It's a game



Fun the first time. The hundredth? Not so much.

where zombies walk towards you and you hit/shoot them. For hours on end. Yes it has funny decapitations and broken arms that swing in the socket, but *Dead Island* had those, too – 100,000 times over, in fact.

And we don't buy into the game as a killer co-op experience, as there's little beneficial interaction between characters. It's so much easier to forgive glitches, outdated visuals and flick-book framerate when you've got a friend laughing at them too, but this doesn't mean we should forgive them. Should *Riptide* wash up on your shore, you'd best throw in back in.

XBOX LIVE

Four players can stove deadheads in together, and really should if they're to get any enjoyment of *Riptide*. Enemy strength is better balanced this time, too, letting mismatched teams progress with ease.



We never thought we'd get bored of exploding heads.

THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?

Trudging around flooded island hammering zombies.

What's it like?

A soggy version of the original, including the shambolic bugs.

Who's it for?

The easily pleased. And series fans.

XBOX 360 VERDICT

- Boats mince zombies up real good
- More technically stable than original...
- ...but not by much
- Zombie sieges fall flat
- Makes zombie killing seem dull

THE SCORE
Paltry improvements on an already fetid concept

4

Details



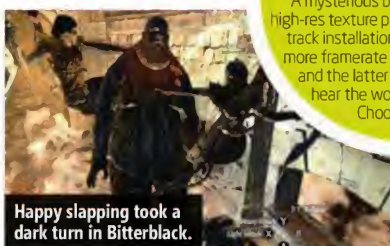
Released
OUT
NOW

Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom
Price £19.99
Players 1
Co-op None

Did you know?

INSERT DISC 2

A mysterious bonus disc includes a high-res texture pack and Japanese voice track installation. The former causes more framerate issues than it should, and the latter means you'll never hear the word "aught" again. Choose wisely.



Happy slapping took a dark turn in Bitterblack.



If Death hits a pawn, it's banished to the Rift.



Cramped spaces make combat more chaotic.

Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen

The oddball RPG has sold its soul for more Souls

XBOX 360
THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE
MUST BUY!

Reviewer



Adam Glick

XBOX LIVE

Live interaction remains nebulous – sidekick Pawns are sent to other players to earn and learn. That said, with 100 new items there's more to equip them with before handing over control.

THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?

An expanded edition of last year's brilliant RPG weirdo.

What's it like?

Bigger, harder, and less sexy than those words imply.

Who's it for?

Interested initiates, and fans with a few spare groats.

Whatever else you might like to say about it, *Dragon's Dogma* was very much its own game. An Eastern take on Western fantasy RPGs, the game's tactile battle systems, graphical problems, deep storyline and brilliant asymmetric multiplayer solution all shoved at each other to earn the player's attention. And it worked – we still haven't played anything quite like it.

Which makes it doubly strange that the new portions in *Dark Arisen* – the full version of the original game is included here – amount to what appears to be an amazingly competent *Dark Souls* mod.

Far from the continent of Gransys' rolling wilderness, new area Bitterblack Isle is an altogether different environment, rich with interlocking, corpse-strewn warrens, battle-

scarred courtyards and all the trappings of a fantasy fortress gone terribly to seed. From a gameplay perspective, it takes the intricately crafted level design of the *Souls* series and infuses it with a threat offered only sporadically in the main game – darkness. *Dragon's Dogma* made the night a scary time. Monsters were tougher, visibility was drastically lower – you were going to die, so you rested and waited for dawn. On Bitterblack, it's always night.

Appropriately, that threat's matched in execution. *Dark Arisen*'s most notable for its difficulty – we were told not to attempt it unless we were Level 50, but our Level 75 Sorcerer met his match many times over. Bosses are thrown at you with abandon, appearing out of nowhere and forcing you to create new tactics on the fly. They're a newly varied bunch too, with everything from a troll with a bright pink baboon-arse weak point to Death itself, a mix of the original's incrementally-defeated Ur-Dragon and the constant threat of Pyramid Head rendered in 20ft-tall, scythe-wielding form.

What we're saying is it's really bloody hard, and the almost objective-less nature of your quest on the Isle, pieced together

by finding literal fragments of story during your travails, makes it an even longer experience than it might have been.

That said, given that this is a boxed release, seasoned veterans will need to decide whether they value even this much new content at such a price. Transferable save games, unlimited fast travel access and 100,000 rift crystals to spend might help swing the deal. For those on the fence however, the full game with hours of new content should be all you need to hop off. We wouldn't be surprised if this is the best budget release all year.

XBOX 360 VERDICT


- ✓ New approach to a unique game
- ✓ A genuine challenge for veterans
- ✓ An amazing deal for newbies
- ✗ Expensive for repeat players
- ✗ Original's problems still unchanged

THE SCORE
New island, new challenges, still insane

8

Details

ARCADIA



Released OUT NOW

Publisher bitComposer Entertainment
Developer Black Forest Games
Price 1,200MP (£9.75)
Players 1
Co-op None



Did you know?

GUESS HÜLSBECK?

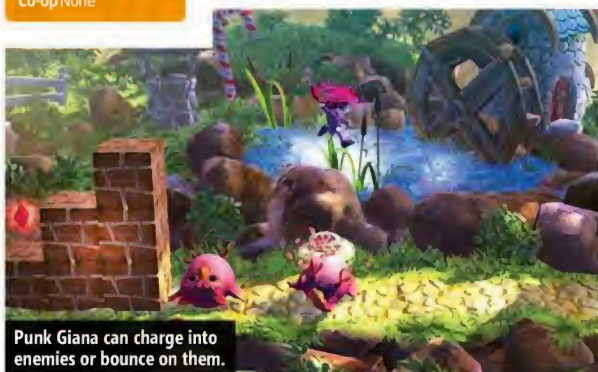
Despite modern orchestration, the main theme sounds curiously old-fashioned. Not surprising when you learn that original *Giana Sisters* composer Chris Hülsbeck is responsible. He also worked on retro classics *Turrican* and *Apolyta*.



The larger gems are well hidden.



You can swim under water without air.



Punk Giana can charge into enemies or bounce on them.



Trails of coloured gems offer visual clues.



Don't expect to finish in one piece first time.

Giana Sisters: Twisted Dreams



Can this XBLA comeback Kickstart the platform genre?

Reviewer



Chris Schilling

You may just be old enough to remember *The Great Giana Sisters*, a 1987 platformer that attracted controversy and legal threats for its similarities to Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros*. Hurriedly withdrawn from shelves, it earned cult status as a collector's item. Now Giana and Maria have made an unlikely comeback courtesy of Kickstarter, and thankfully *Twisted Dreams* has more than enough ideas of its own to avoid any lawsuits this time around.

It wastes little time getting down to business, with Maria being swallowed by a swirling vortex and sister Giana leaping in after her. You'll run, jump, bounce on enemies and collect gems as in the original, but *Twisted Dreams*' hook is

its switching mechanic, which allows you to morph between Giana's cute and punk personas at the squeeze of a trigger. Both guises have different abilities – cute Giana can pirouette in mid-air to slow her descent, while punk Giana is a bundle of ferocious energy, bouncing between pinball bumpers and charging into enemies.

To make this character-swapping more interesting, the world instantly changes from a lush, summery setting to a decaying underworld. The music shifts, too, with guitar riffs kicking in whenever punk Giana is on-screen. It's a beautiful game in places, but so visually busy that it's easy to lose track of hazards or quickly work out which surfaces are solid and which are background detail.

It's less of an issue in the early stages, but as the difficulty ramps up and the gaps between checkpoints widen, you'll end up having to repeat some lengthy sections several times. In fact, stage length is a problem that affects other game modes – we'd be

more likely to speedrun the levels in Time Attack if they were half the size. While most of the game's ideas are original, it overuses some of them to the point of tedium. You may also wish to invest in a spare controller before facing the final boss, which was one frustration too far for us.

That said, developer Black Forest Games has made its meagre budget go a long way. This is a pretty, inventive platformer that demonstrates both a clear affection for the original and a willingness to try something new. It might not come close to unseating the genre's best, but if you're up for a challenge, then this is a minor gem.

XBOX LIVE

Nothing but a single leaderboard that accumulates your tally on Score Attack mode. Disappointing, especially given the potential for Time Attack score tables.

THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?

A gorgeous side-scroller with a neat dual-character.

What's it like?

Clever, fun, and at times controller-chuckingly tough.

Who's it for?

Old-school platform fans and anyone seeking a challenge.



XBOX 360 VERDICT

- Attractive worlds
- Inventive character-swapping puzzles
- It's plenty challenging...
- ...but not always for the right reasons
- Unnecessary difficulty spikes

THE SCORE
A beautiful, clever but frustrating platformer

6

Details



Released
OUT
NOW

Publisher Activision
Developer Terminal Reality
Price £49.99
Players 1
Co-op None

The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct

Walking into a no-man's land

Reviewer



Jon Blyth
OXM Log

One good thing I can say about *Survival Instinct*: there are times, when you're creeping around the dimly-lit rooms, that you feel the chill of a survival atmosphere. Ammo is as scarce as it is undesirable – firing a shotgun will alert Walkers in a huge radius to your presence – so for much of the time, it's you and a hunting knife.

That's about it for the good stuff. During preview rounds, Terminal Reality spoke of an AMC Bible that guided its design decisions – however, it's made some stunning gaffes.

Most importantly, killing Walkers is all wrong. Here, you can kill one with a slash of knife to the back. No. No, Terminal Reality. In this world, if you decapitate a Walker, it is not dead – the head lives on, snapping naughtily at the air in front of it, in the unformed hope that some live meat falls in.

You can deal with the Walkers in one of three ways: melee, gun or avoid. All three are annoying. Melee lacks the casual

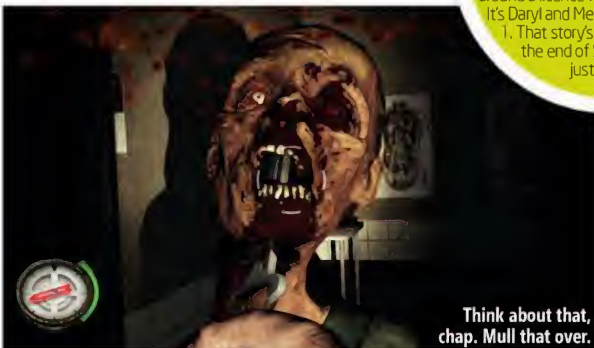
finesse of the TV show, with Daryl slashing, hammering and slicing lethargically through the horde. There's a stealthy instakill (which you can incorporate into regular combat by circling and tapping RB from behind), but even that takes too long and leaves you open to side attacks. Guns are practically suicide.

You might kill one Walker, but they will appear from everywhere, which quickly forces you into the avoid tactic, which involves running around in wide circles, to steer clear of their annoyingly long reach, until you find something to climb, duck under, or jump on. It's just so desperately

Did you know?

AMC? OH I SEE

The Telltale series is built around a comic book licence, and *Survival Instinct* is built around a licence from the AMC TV show. It's Daryl and Merle's story, pre-Season 1. That story's been a big focus of the end of Season 3, which just finished.



Think about that, chap. Mull that over.

THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?

A first-person stabber with few redeeming features.

What's it like?

Stabbing a bunch of zombies in the head, a lot.

Who's it for?

People who hate the franchise and want it to fail.



Slash to the back. Not how zombies die.



Survivors can forage while you fight.

unconvincing and unchanging, and the relationship between Daryl and Merle is like watching the end of *Star Wars Episode III* try to beat itself into shape.

There's nothing here. There's no canon you need to know, there are no emotional moments, and none of the human threat that defines a good modern zombie story. You won't find any of the crazy, colourful psychopaths of *Dead Rising*, and nothing like an eye-patched David Morrissey as the governor. This is just an unfinished slice of boredom, with whatever ambitions its developers may have sincerely had comprehensively thwarted.

XBOX 360 VERDICT

- Some moments of tension
- Similar Walker models
- That's not how you kill them
- Unchanging, uninteresting, unfun
- Ugly as all hell

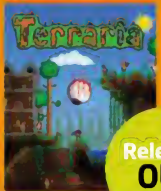
THE SCORE

That's no way to treat a quality series, Activision

3

Details

ARCADE



Released
OUT
NOW

Publisher 505 Games
Developer Engine
Software BV/Re-Logic
Price 1,200MP (£9.75)
Players 1-8
Co-op 2-8 players



Terraria

Can Re-Logic's tile-based sandbox dig its way out of Minecraft's shadow?

Reviewer



Ben Borthwick

Superficially, this is a creative sandbox game in which you "mine" materials from a randomly generated world made up of squares. You can then "craft" them into structures, tools and equipment. In turn, that new equipment allows you to explore further into the world and mine better materials, and so on. The comparisons to a certain other XBLA best-selling elephant in the room are going to be both inevitable and – to a degree – understandable.

You start off in both games with the basic aim of creating a shelter, and are subsequently left to your own devices – if you want to craft a two-dimensional effigy of your preferred celebrity, you can. But if



Biomes range from the desolate desert sands...



...to dense jungles with dangerous flora and fauna.

you choose to explore, you'll discover natural tunnels that have already been started, chests with items granting you abilities such as a double jump, or potions that reverse the flow of gravity. Nearly everything you find goes towards improving your character somehow – whether it's an ability to make it easier to navigate around the maps, or something that gives a temporary stat boost to aid your battles against the various enemies dotted around the land.

You swiftly develop an RPG-like attachment to your character, and the endless opportunities to improve them are hard to resist. Stakes can be raised by the option to have death drop all your equipment, requiring a *Dark Souls*-style

slog to retrieve it, or kill you off permanently – making building your character as much of a task as shaping the individual world. Crucially, your worlds and your characters are saved as two separate entities – if you want to explore a whole new world (or a world of your friends') while kitted out in the gear you spent three days making and discovering in the last one, you can. Alternatively, you can bring in a local player using split-screen co-op.

Did you know?

WIKI-D SICK

The *Terraria* Wiki is an invaluable guide for finding out how to obtain the most lucrative goodies in the game, as well as advising you on how to summon and defeat the bosses. You can find it at bit.ly/oxmterraria

Boss-a-nova

What really sets *Terraria* apart from *Minecraft* are the bosses and special events. These monstrosities range from giant eyeballs that shoot smaller eyeballs,

"Where *Minecraft* encourages creativity, *Terraria*'s more of a 'game' with definitive goals"

The grappling hook is essential early on.



THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?

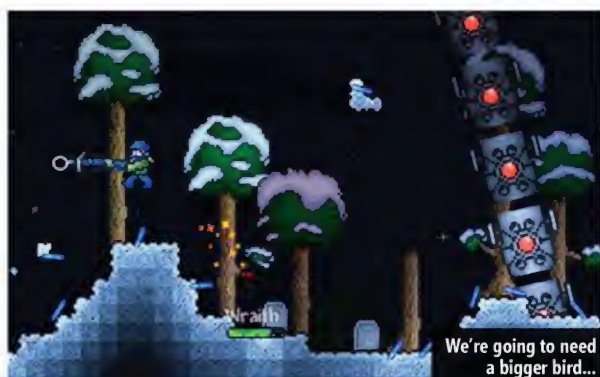
A freeform two-dimensional sandbox adventure.

What's it like?

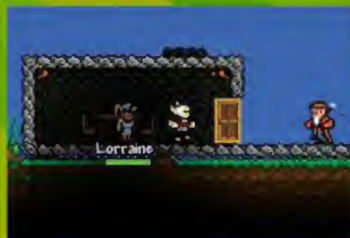
Actually closer to *Spelunky* than *Minecraft*.

Who's it for?

Those wanting to explore the world, rather than build it.



WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS



Your first NPC (The Guide) will spawn in your world automatically. Build him a shelter and he'll give you useful advice as well as show you things you can craft from items in your inventory. There are plenty of other NPCs – a Merchant will show up once you've collected your first silver coin, a Nurse will appear after you've broken your first Heart Crystal (increasing your health), a Demolitionist will emerge when you find your first explosive, and an Arms Dealer will, naturally, turn up after you find your first gun. The others we'll leave to you to discover.

This season's fishbowl-on-head look. Stylish!



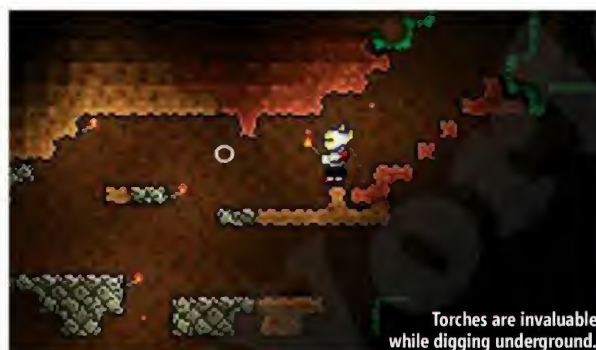
to walls of flesh that chase you through the depths, forcing you to fight while traversing a lava filled hell-world. Overcoming these bosses rewards you with special ores and unique drops that can only be obtained by defeating them. These in turn lead to some of the best equipment in the game.

The various biomes provide a similar variety and challenge for intrepid explorers in far more than just an aesthetic sense. The purple-tinted Corruption biome contains deadly chasms and one-eyed monsters that constantly chase unwary travellers. The Jungle biome features man-eating plants, underground wasps and caverns of piranha-infested waters. Occasionally even the 'standard' land will become hostile, with random Blood Moon events or Goblin Armies attacking your home village, turning curious expeditions to uncover more of the map into frantic fights for the survival of you and your self-made settlement.

You're never forced to explore, but doing so uncovers more and more layers in a

XBOX LIVE

You can have up to eight players in your world online to build and tackle bosses together, or switch to PvP mode and fight to the death.



game with a ridiculous amount of things to do. Every system branches in numerous different directions, and there's a constant and almost overwhelming stream of distractions – which is one of the few criticisms you can level at the game. *Terraria's* huge potential is ill-explained, particularly in the early stages, and your first dalliances can be an intimidating and complicated slog. Although NPCs give you a vague nudge, you'll almost certainly have to consult outside sources (such as

the brilliant *Terraria* Wiki, see Did You Know?, left) in order to help you decide on your next adventure.

The longer you spend in *Terraria*, the more you'll discover that the *Minecraft* comparison, while obvious, isn't fair to either. Compared to Mojang's all-conquering virtual Lego set that encourages creativity, *Terraria* is much more of a 'game' with definitive goals, rules and progression that deserves to stand on its own merits.

XBOX 360 VERDICT

- Plenty of stuff to discover
- Satisfying sense of progression
- Compelling risk and reward cycle
- Controls take getting used to
- Lack of direction off-putting

THE SCORE

Deep, rich and addictive

8



Released
OUT
NOW

Publisher Microsoft
Developer
The Behemoth
Price 1,200MP (£9.75)
Players 1-4
Co-op 2 players

BattleBlock Theater

Gladiators meets Mario in The Behemoth's whimsical wonder

Reviewer



Edwin Evans-Thirlwell
OXMETBoy

The phrase 'thinking outside the box' is common among developers, but all too often it translates to 'new AI behaviours' or 'Horde Mode 3.5'. Enter *BattleBlock Theater*, a sharp, smart 2D platformer from the minds behind *Castle Crashers* which does, in fact, think outside the box, despite being made almost entirely of them.

The action begins when your party of pint-sized sailors shipwrecks on an island run by sadistic cats, who force them to compete in an endless array of gladiatorial trials (that's 450 to begin with, plus whatever you create using the remarkably

controller-friendly level editor). An oddball narrator – think *Bastion*'s Rucks with a hefty dose of the Joker – takes the minutes, launching into madcap soliloquies during cutscenes that break up chapters. The writing is occasionally too self-aware for its own good, but it's often hilarious, and while lines do repeat, there's variety enough to justify donning some headphones.

Did you know?

STAMPING GROUND

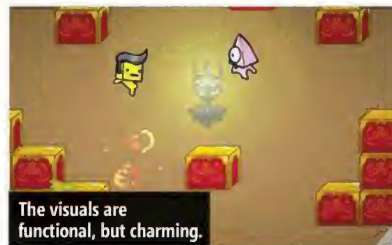
The narrator is voiced by Will Stamper, veteran designer and cultural legend at Flash gaming portal Newgrounds.com, where *The Behemoth* began life. You might want to exercise caution when listening to his other stuff.

Theatre of war

BattleBlock Theater's Story Mode is split into worlds comprising 12 levels plus a boss stage, with the goal to simply gather enough gems to open the exit door. Gems are also used to buy character skins at gift shops; more enticing are the yarn balls which can be traded with feline wardens for weapons, like Hadokens that fall upwards and vacuum cleaners that Hoover up enemy ordinance. Add these to the (temporary) power-ups, which include jet packs and wings you flap by tapping 'jump'.

It's a familiar assortment, and so are the blocks themselves – slippery ice blocks, cloud blocks that can be jumped through, platforms that rise when stood on, and fans that waft you into ceiling spikes. *BattleBlock Theater*'s scintillating genius is partly a question of how these old devices are perverted – in a cheeky revisiting of Mario's burned-bottom leap, lava blocks serve as bounce pads, and crumbling blocks set off their neighbours too, triggering smart puzzles involving chain reactions.

Mainly, though, it's in how they're combined. If modern development is increasingly about conjuring the maximum variety from the minimum resources, this could be Xbox Live Arcade's greatest stage



The visuals are functional, but charming.

"This could be XBLA's greatest stage magician"

THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?

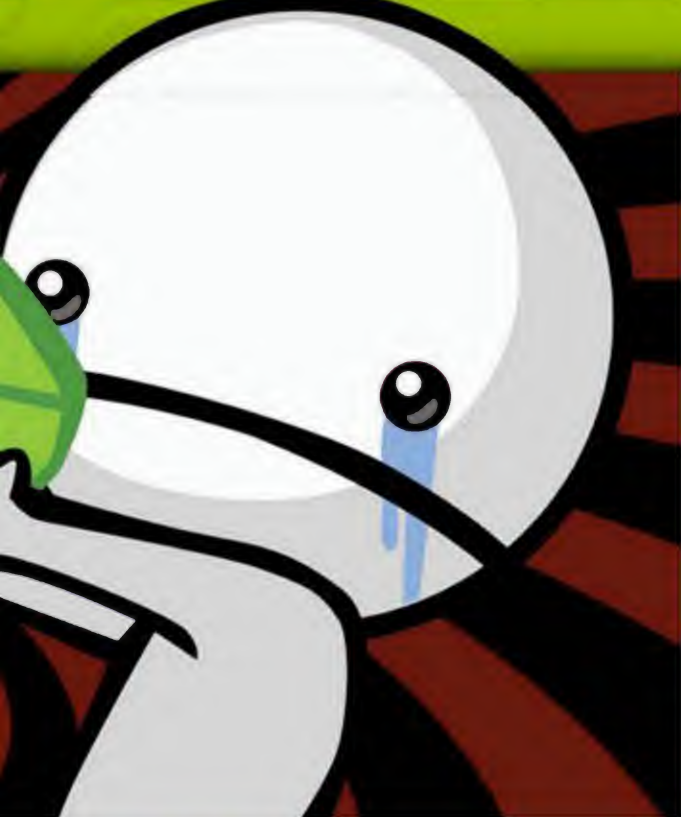
Macabre platformer with tonnes of levels and MP features.

What's it like?

A WWE wrestling match in a building-sized game of *Tetris*.

Who's it for?

Platform fans and people who like each other, but not much.



Boss levels are gruelling time trials.



Pay attention to signs. You'll live longer.



Grab the golden hat for extra gems.

magician. One level might call to mind the hectic pace of vintage *Sonic*, as spring-loaded flippers conspire with teleportation tubes to fling players into water hazards.

Then you're plunged into something redolent of *Super Meat Boy*, an alternating sequence of conveyor belt platforms and sawblades, with a grenade-throwing goon at the end for good measure. Death is frequent on Normal mode, but so too are the checkpoints – and while some hazards are harder to see coming than others, there's relatively little of the bruising trial-and-error that characterises the work of Team Meat. Well, providing you aren't too fussed about gathering all of a level's gems in the fastest possible time.

Best frenemies forever

Once you've polished off the campaign there's a meatily outfitted multiplayer, which comes in four-player competitive and two-player "co-optional" flavours. The competitive offerings sound great on paper – highlights include a race to paint all the level's blocks your colour, and a bizarre horse-riding mini-game helped along by strategic laser beams. The complexities of the levels tend to get lost in the chaos, however, and some modes are a shade gimmicky. That's handily compensated for

"It thinks outside the box, despite being made almost entirely of them"



SETTING THE STAGE

BattleBlock Theater's level editor is one of the simplest and easiest to use we've come across, but that doesn't make it dumb. You begin by choosing the height and width of the stage, then use the left and right triggers to tab out menus and cycle options with the D-pad. The majority of the single-player props are here – indeed, it's tempting to conclude that The Behemoth built the game using these very same tools. Be sure to keep an eye on the user-created playlists over the coming weeks.

by the co-op stuff, where the necessity of working together is undercut by the ability to use an ally's corpse as a stepping stone.

The last hurrah goes to the electronica soundtrack, all warbling chipsets and daft voice work: the only negative thing that can be said of it is that there's not enough of it, which isn't a complaint you can make of the game as a whole. *BattleBlock Theater* is one of Xbox Live Arcade's masterworks, and a reminder that genuine, bona fide imagination is possible even in the twilight of a console generation.

XBOX 360 VERDICT

- Absolutely stuffed with content
- Sharp handling
- Fantastic variety
- Full-fat community options
- Gimmicky in places

THE SCORE
A better kind of blockbuster

9

Microsoft



FORZA

HORIZON™

CRASH

THE

PARTY!



OUT NOW
WHERE CARS
BELONG!

XBOX.COM/FORZAHORIZON



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XBOX 360.

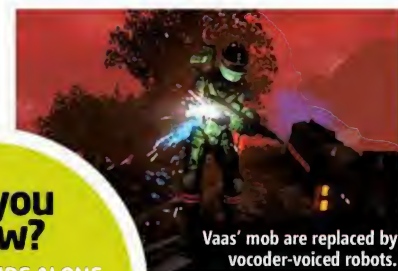
Jump in.

Details

ARCADIA
Far Cry 3 Blood Dragon

Released OUT NOW

Publisher Ubisoft
Developer Ubisoft Montreal
Price 1,200MP (€9.75)
Players 1
Co-op None



Did you know?

A HERO STANDS ALONE

This is a standalone game, not DLC, with a single island to explore. It's smaller than *FC3*, but angrier, with lots of roaming enemies as well as outposts to liberate. Doing so adds some simple side quests.

Far Cry 3 Blood Dragon

Robocop and He-Man walk into a bar, and hit Jason Brody with it

Reviewer



Jon Hicks
OXMjonty

There is much that is perfect about *Blood Dragon*, not least the fact that Ubisoft green-lit it in the first place. At any other company, you suspect the idea of converting your open-world shooter into a hybrid of neon-flecked 1980s sci-fi movies in which a grizzled cyborg battles laser-equipped dragons would be rejected out of hand.

Ubisoft made it anyway. It brought in *Terminator*'s Michael Biehn to voice the cyborg, which is perfect, it gave him some truly awful one-liners, which are perfect, and it set the whole thing to a synth-heavy soundtrack which is indistinguishable from the original *Terminator* score and thus, perfect. The barely-animated 16-bit cutscenes that tell the story are perfect,



too, although it's oddly jarring to hear them properly voiced rather than expressed through pixelated text.

The problems start when the nostalgic veneer cracks and you start contemplating the world itself, which bodes much of what made *Far Cry 3* fun in the first place. Overuse of heavy enemies limits the stealth potential for much of the five-hour runtime, and a swiftly-issued minigun makes it unnecessary anyway. Animals, previously wild-cards that could swing a mission for or against you, are now just inconsequential roadkill, albeit with new metallic-paint finishes and robotic eyes.

There's still potential for experimentation in how you approach missions or (optional) outposts, but invariably only as a prelude to a bullet-spraying bloodbath, and while that's entirely appropriate to the story it's never as robust as *Gears* or *Bulletstorm*. The titular Blood Dragons, giant lizards with laser eyes, bad eyesight and a weakness for your limitless supply of robot hearts, are disappointingly easily manipulated: the only challenge is occasionally you've got to shoot their

mind-control hats off before they start chewing on guards rather than you.

The story's weirdly assembled, too, veering from offensive video nasty to clear-eyed Saturday-morning-cartoon moralising and back again like a deranged marketeer trying to retcon Pikachu into *Evil Dead*. If it happened in the '80s, throw it in, seems to be the thinking, but this wouldn't have felt coherent even in Thatcher's day and there are a few flashes of prejudice that would have been better left to history.

Yet it's the story that makes the game worth buying. It so shamelessly steals from its source material that you can't help but laugh at the results – particularly the truly ridiculous finale that makes up for the fact that all previous narrative takes place in cutscenes. Like its VHS inspiration, then, it's worth playing *Blood Dragon* to soak up the nostalgia, but its commitment to dumbing down means it's a purebred B-game rather than all-star A-listener.

THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?

Far Cry 3 with big hair, neon trim, and a synth soundtrack.

What's it like?

Watching an RSC production of *Robocop*.

Who's it for?

Anybody who knows both Cringer and Clarence Boddicker.



XBOX 360 VERDICT

- Perfect soundtrack
- Steals from the best
- Commendably bonkers story
- A bit boring underneath it all
- Overly keen on being stupid

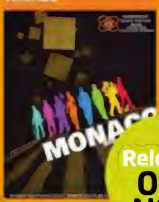
THE SCORE

Hilarious nostalgia but a bit too dumb

7

Details

ARCADE

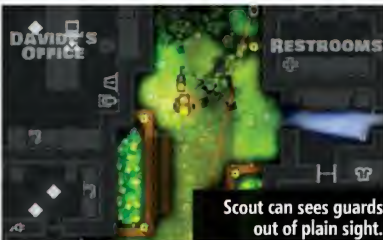


Released
OUT
NOW

Publisher Majesco
Entertainment
Developer
Pocketwatch Games
Price 1,200MP (£9.75)
Players 1-4
Co-op 2-4 players

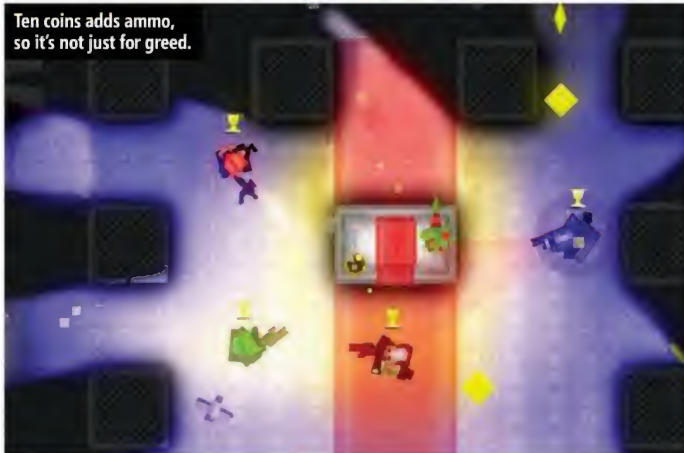
XBOX 360
THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE
MUST BUY!

If god took mushrooms
and watched a heist.



Scout can see guards
out of plain sight.

Ten coins adds ammo,
so it's not just for greed.



Monaco

Heists have never had such a saturated palette

Reviewer



Jon Blyth
OXM Log

XBOX LIVE

The fairly static screens mean local co-op is fuss-free, but it's also easy to slip into online mode and invite people into your game. Use a headset though, as communication makes it more fun.

Roguelikes aren't traditionally a beautiful genre - they're beasts built from ASCII. But *Monaco* is like a dozen neon signs, fizzing under a sheet of greaseproof paper. As you explore the maps, your line of sight sashes paint across them. It's a kaleidoscope that's surprisingly pleasant, and a little bit distracting. You'll soon tune out the pretty glow and focus on the thievery at hand.

Behind the colours, the goals and controls for *Monaco* are dedicated to simplicity. It's virtually all on one thumbstick. You use objects in the world by moving towards them - computers spit out a hacking spark that follows you around the

building, disabling security. Disguises will fool guards, from a distance. Every action will trigger a timer clock that you'll come to think of as your biggest enemy: it's this delay that makes every action a gamble.

This is where the classes come in.

The devotion to simplicity means that most of the class bonuses are passive boosts. Locksmiths can unlock doors much more quickly. The Gentleman can slip automatically into disguise, and the Scout can see guards through walls. The Mole, meanwhile, can dig through walls. It's a powerful tool for reshaping maps that would be overpowered if it didn't come at the price of heavy guard attention.

Co-operative multiplayer is technically optional - but realistically, it's absolutely essential. *Monaco* was built with collaboration in mind, and playing alone is only really useful for learning the rules of the game, the alertness of the guards, and the behaviour of the security systems. Once you've got the hang of it, you're best to get online as soon as possible, before

you get bored. It's only when you've got four players working together, each using their talents, that the game suddenly snicks together, and you can start to play stylishly and with satisfaction.

Recent XBLA heist competitor *Dollar Dash* went for heist chaos, and became so chaotic that it ended up unplayable. *Monaco*, on the other hand, is intelligent, tense, and chaos is just one tool in the box. With a bit of communication, teamwork and timing, you might even make a stealth run. *Monaco* is a stylish and considered game that's all the more remarkable for being the work of just one man. It's absolutely worth your money.

Did you know?

WHAT'S YOURS IS MINE

There was a brief worry when *Monaco's* tagline, 'What's Yours Is Mine', was also being used by Square Enix for the *Thief* reboot. Luckily, no lawyers were necessary, and everyone agreed that they could use the phrase.

THE KNOWLEDGE

What is it?

A four-player co-op heist with tinkly pianos.

What's it like?

A simple idea, executed with elegance.

Who's it for?

Casual and core alike - as long as you're co-op.

XBOX 360 VERDICT

- Neon francophone roguelike
- Cleverly put together
- Classes click well into teams
- The music begins to grate
- Not a game for solo players

THE SCORE
Taste the rainbow
of grand larceny

8

»Details



Publisher Atlus
Developer Arc
System Works
Price £39.99
Players 1-2
Co-op None

Released
**10
MAY**

Persona 4 Arena

The first sniff of the RPG on Xbox is a brawler...

A hybrid 2D fighting game is a risky way of bringing juggernaut JRPG franchise *Persona* onto the Xbox 360 for the first time. But, thanks to a clever collaboration with *Guilty Gear* and *BlazBlue* developer Arc System Works, Atlus has pulled it off incredibly well.

Success is mainly down to the multiple modes on offer, which cater to both RPG and fighting game fans. For those hungry for more *Persona*, Story mode provides an almost overwhelming amount of info and back-story on each of the 13 playable characters. Fight fans, on the other hand,

will find their fun in Arcade and Versus modes. Fighting is a fast and frantic combo of physical attacks and the unique abilities of your *Persona*. It's a system that's easy to master in basic terms, but offers further levels of complexity for those willing to dig a little deeper, with Training and Challenge modes to help you master both the basic and more advanced techniques.



XBOX 360 VERDICT

THE SCORE
Vibrant and
vivacious violence

8

»Details



Publisher Gravity
Developer Gravity
Price 800MP
(£6.50)
Players 1-2
Co-op 1-2 players

Released
**OUT
NOW**

Double Dragon II: Wander of the Dragons

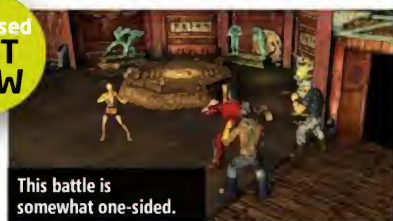
A Dragon Called Wander

A remake of the original 1988 arcade game, this XBLA title is so awful that it makes you disproportionately grateful for every good beat 'em up game you've ever played.

Attacks are a matter of simply mashing a combos of X and B, and occasionally holding

RT to do a power attack – which uses the exact same animation as a regular one, just slightly slower. Blocking's temperamental, dodging is fiddly and Perfect Guards, which are executed when you block at a specific time, use up the stamina meter, leaving you completely open to follow-up attacks.

This game isn't fun. On any level. The story is non-existent, the fighting is unsatisfying, the stages are ugly, and *DDLII's* idea of music is an infuriating ten-second riff played on a never-ending loop. Plus, there's no online co-op, and Survival and Versus modes are just as unappealing as the main game. Save your Microsoft Points for a title that deserves them.

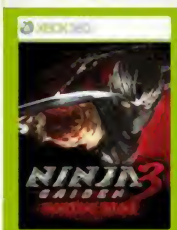


XBOX 360 VERDICT

THE SCORE
Needs to take a long
wander off a short cliff

1

»Details



Publisher Tecmo Koei
Developer Team Ninja
Price £29.99
Players 1-8
Co-op 1-2 players

Released
**OUT
NOW**

Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge

All buffed up and nowhere to go

Razor's Edge is a remake of *Ninja Gaiden 3*, released one year later. It addresses some of the complaints made against Team Ninja's poorly-selling title: new weapons, another playable character and boosted difficulty levels.

But who is this aimed at? Purchasers of the original game who got stung? Are

they supposed to buy it again? Is it for the people who were tempted, but were put off by the reviews? Is it the game they originally intended, or the one they made in response to feedback? And either way, isn't that quite damning?

Technically, this is an improvement. The new weapons addresses the monotony of

the main game, pink-haired Ayane gets two chapters to play through, and Ryu's cursed arm is no longer capable of long execution chains. There's a mighty slew of tweaks throughout, but nothing that really makes the game worth re-releasing. You know a more convincing way to win back the love of disillusioned fans? Don't ask them to pay for your apology: make a new, better, game.



XBOX 360 VERDICT

THE SCORE
There's no actual
reason for this

6

GET MORE! Read reviews of many more games on your cover disc

ENDER

The latest update to Minecraft is the most dramatic yet, adding a host of new abilities and new foe The Ender Dragon. Here's how to handle them

GAME

Words: Phil Savage

HOW TO BEAT THE END

STEP 1> BEFORE YOU GO

Once you reach The End, there's no going back until you've defeated the Ender Dragon. Before setting off, you'll need enchanted weapons and armour, strength and health potions, a stack of cheap building materials, and a lot of arrows.

STEP 2> FINDING THE STRONGHOLD

You need at least 12 Eyes of Ender – crafted with an Ender Pearl and Blaze Powder. Hit LT when holding an Eye, and it'll float before hitting the floor. The direction it floats is a signal towards the Stronghold.

STEP 3> END PORTAL

Head to the Stronghold and search for the End Portal. You'll find it towards the bottom, suspended over a pool of lava and protected by a Silverfish spawner. Pop your Ender Eyes into each slot of the portal and it'll activate. Jump in!

STEP 4> THE END

Take care when you first enter: you spawn on a small obsidian platform, under or beside the main End island. Carefully dig your way to the top, or build a platform leading across. The Ender Dragon shouldn't attack until you reach the surface.

STEP 5> HEALING CRYSTALS

Each of those obsidian pillars contains an Ender Crystal. They're your first target. Their purple rays heal the Ender Dragon, so killing him while they're active is impossible. Luckily, they're fragile. A few well-aimed arrows should do it.

STEP 6> CAGED CRYSTALS

Two crystals have been sneakily encased in iron bars, preventing you from taking them out at range. That's where your building materials come in: jump stack your way to the top of a pillar, and you can easily knock down the barrier.

STEP 7> ACID ATTACK

The Ender Dragon has two attacks. His long-range acid ball is easy to avoid and – if you're wearing enchanted armour – not too harmful. His second, an acid spray, is much more deadly. Keep mobile to avoid its shorter range.

STEP 8> FINISH HIM

After circling the pillars a few times, the Ender Dragon will hover over the centre of the island. Now's your chance to pelt him with arrows. After a few rounds of attacking and dodging, a purple explosion will signal your victory.



GUIDE TO... BREWING

SETTING UP

To start, you'll need a brewing stand, a cauldron and a lot of glass bottles. Setting up is easy: Fill the cauldron with water, transfer that water over to three glass bottles, then pop the bottles into the bottom of the stand.



CONSERVING INGREDIENTS

Where possible, fill the stand with bottles. Potions aren't expensive, but when each ingredient can distil down into three bottles, not using every space is a waste. Stick a stack of sand in a furnace to ensure you have enough glass.



WARTS AND ALL

Nether Wart turns water bottles into Awkward Potions, the awkwardly named base for all the best effects. Bring back some Soul Sand too, as you can use it to plant a Nether Wart garden for an infinite supply.



GOLDEN TOUCH

For an instant healing potion, add a Glistering Melon – created by combining a slice of melon with a gold nugget. For extra strength, add Blaze powder. Or, create deadly poisons with a spider's eye. See bit.ly/oxmbrew for more.



SPLASH DAMAGE

Weaponise any potion by using a Creeper's gunpowder as an ingredient. It'll create a splash potion, which can be fired like any ranged weapon for an area-of-effect splash of devastating debuffs or helpful party healing.



"Nether Wart turns water bottles into Awkward Potions"





GETTING THE MOST OUT OF... ITEM FRAMES

For the most part, item frames are purely decorative. Place one on a wall and you can display any item by placing it on the frame with LT. Doing so removes that item from your inventory, so it's not a great idea to plaster your house with pictures of diamonds unless you feel really flash.

Not all of the frame's uses are aesthetic, however. They're great

for marking the contents of a chest or dispenser, or as a place to hang a functional, wall-mounted clock, letting you know when its safe to emerge from a mining session. You can even rotate an item by tapping the frame with LT. Try framing a few arrows to create directional signs, rotating them to point in the direction of a cave or dungeon.

"You can use item frames to create directional signs, rotating arrows to point in the direction of a dungeon"

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF... DISPENSERS

Dispensers will dispense any item you place in them when activated by a button, lever or redstone circuit. In most cases, the dispenser will drop its cargo as a collectible item. However, some items dispense "activated" – arrows, spawn eggs, splash potions and enchanting bottles all work as if triggered by a player. Naturally this can be used for good or ill. The image to the right shows a health station – a dispenser that fires out a healing splash potion when the button is pressed. If you're feeling less altruistic, you could fill a wall of dispensers with TNT, using a pressure plate and redstone circuit to create an explosive trap.



GUIDE TO... ENCHANTING



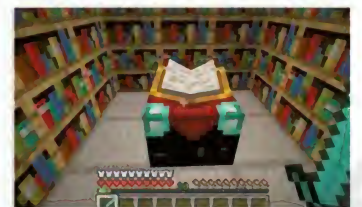
STEP 1 > POWER UP

The maximum level cost for enchantments is 30, but on its own the enchantment table can only perform Level 8 upgrades. To enhance it you need 15 bookshelves, positioned around the table.



STEP 2 > LUCK OF THE DRAW

Pop a weapon or armour in the table and you'll be given three random options. Each item can be enhanced only once, so unless you don't fancy an all-powerful shovel, pick the highest level cost you can afford.



STEP 3 > LEVEL CURVE

The higher your level, the more XP it takes to level up. So if you're Level 40 and buy two Level 20 enchantments, one of them has cost exponentially more XP than the other. To efficiently enchant, try taking something to the table every time you hit Level 30.



STEP 4 > ENCHANTMENTS

The bow's Infinity enchantment supplies unlimited arrows as long as you hold one in your inventory, and Feather Falling for boots reduces fall damage. For weapons, the Flame enchantment not only sets mobs alight, but pre-cooks the meat of pigs and cows when you kill them.

GUIDE TO... REDSTONE

STEP 1 > WIRES

Redstone is a powerful tool, and deceptively simple to use. The basic idea: the ore you mine underground can be placed directly onto rocks to create a wire. That wire can be powered with switches, or the always-on redstone torch, to carry a signal that can activate doors, machinery and powered minecart rails. If this is your first attempt, don't go in with a grand design for some elegant automation. Just load up Creative mode, fill your inventory with items from the Redstone tab, then start connecting stuff on the ground and watching how it interacts.



STEP 2 > SWITCHES

Your basic switch types: buttons, which create a short signal pulse; levers, which toggle the signal on or off; and pressure plates, which create signal when the player steps on them. Switches also let you create logic circuits when combined with redstone torches. For a simple NOT gate, lead your wire to a torch, then place a button on a block next to it. When pressed, the button will deactivate the torch, disabling the circuit it powers.



STEP 3 > REPEATER

A signal will only travel through 15 blocks of redstone wire before it runs out of power. For more involved projects, you'll need to boost that signal – placing repeaters at intervals along the wire to extend the circuit. Repeaters also let you time activations by delaying the signal that passes through them. You can use this to activate machines in a sequence. Imagine a gauntlet of dispensers firing arrows in a line, activated by a pressure plate triggered by an unsuspecting player.



STEP 4 > HIDING YOUR CIRCUIT

This is where things become tricky. When it comes to not showing your workings, expect some trial and error, as it's all too easy to accidentally break a circuit. While you're building cover, a good tip is to temporarily connect the circuit to a piston, then use a redstone torch to lock it into an active state. If you accidentally cut the connection, the circuit will deactivate, and the loud, unmistakable sound of the piston contracting will warn you that something messed up.



"Combine pistons with clever redstone circuits"



GETTING THE MOST OUT OF... PISTONS

At their most basic, pistons push any block placed next to them when charged with a redstone signal. They come in two types: regular pistons just push, while sticky pistons also pull the attached block when the signal is deactivated. But there are quirks to the way they function. For starters, they won't push 'heavy' blocks like obsidian and bedrock. They also link: stack two pistons, and both will activate when a signal is run through the top.

On their own, pistons aren't particularly useful. It's when they're combined with clever redstone circuits that they enable some amazing creations. For instance, you can easily create a hidden door with a 2x2 wall of sticky pistons. Place some stone in front of the left side, and another two sticky pistons (facing the stone) on the right. Connect Repeaters, and set them on a small delay. Then, place another Repeater, this time with no delay, in the space where your third piston column will be pushed to.

Connect it all up with one redstone wire, and hook it to a lever. When activated, the piston wall pushes your stone and piston, which activates the third piston column, pushing the stone in another direction. Build a wall here, and when you deactivate the lever, the stone retracts, revealing your hidden door.



BOOST YOUR LEVEL WITH AN XP FARM

Properly utilised, XP Farms allow you to easily boost ten to 20 levels in one mammoth session of death and punching. The downside is, in Survival mode, even the simplest design requires careful planning to pull off.

First, you'll need to find a dungeon – the mossy, underground rooms containing a chest and monster spawner. Disable the spawner by surrounding it in torches, then block off any surrounding cave passages to stop surprise attacks while you work. Clear the dungeon of any extra blocks and chests, then dig out the floor two blocks deep. Your goal is an empty room with the spawner suspended in the middle. Now place water in each corner of the back wall. Depending on the size of the dungeon, the water should flood most of the floor. For any blocks not drenched, dig another level down – then remove the blocks diagonally from this dip, where the water is at its thinnest. At this point, your floor should be entirely flooded. If you stand inside the dungeon,

the water will push you towards the centre of the front wall. Keep mining along where the water is pushing you – creating a three-block-deep trench leading out of the dungeon. Keep going until the water stops. Where the water ends, create a 22-block-deep 1x1 pit. This is where the spawning mobs will fall down, allowing you to easily finish them off. Just be careful you don't fall into an existing cave or lava pool.



Once at the bottom, prepare your killing room. Dig out a small well lit area, just below your pit. You want to leave a one-block space at head height separating you from where the mobs drop. Now dig back up to your chamber, using ladders to give you an easy route up and down. Remove the torches from the dungeon, quickly seal up the walls and cover over the trench. You'll need to stay close – mob spawners only work when you're in a 16-block radius – but after a while, pop down to the killing floor and get punching.

"In Survival, even the simplest design requires planning to correctly pull off"

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF... SPAWN EGGS

Spawn eggs are special eggs used for spawning mobs. Place them like any other block, hitting LT over the highlighted area to create the desired animal. They're only available in Creative mode, and monsters still won't spawn in peaceful difficulty. Eggs can also be placed inside dispensers, which will spawn the relevant mob when activated. Just hook them up to a lever that also activates an iron door and you can create extra-hard gauntlets to run through with friends.



THE BEST NEW WAYS TO PLAY WITH OTHERS

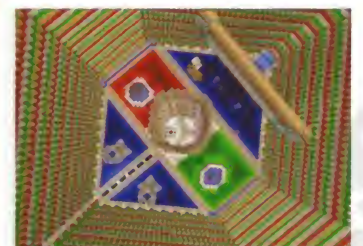
HUNGER GAMES

Home-made, self-hosted multiplayer "modes" are common on Xbox Live, and this is one of the best. Players – or 'Tributes' – start in a circle around a cache of weapons and armour. When the countdown ends, it's a scramble to scavenge the best loot, then dash off into the wilderness to hunt and be hunted. See it in action at: bit.ly/oxmhunger.



THE DROPPER

A series of huge and tricky chambers, the name of this multiplayer map tells you everything you need to know: you're at the top, the exit is right at the bottom, the only way down is to drop. It's an enjoyable test of reactions – as you fall towards the small water block, a number of platforms must be avoided. See it in action at: bit.ly/oxmdrop.



THE WALLS

A slower-paced PvP map than Hunger Games, The Walls sees four players each choose a chamber, separated by huge sand walls. You get 15 minutes to mine and craft your way to the best survival gear, at which point the walls start tumbling down. The winner is the last one standing – so a good balance of defensive structures and weapons is key. See it in action at: bit.ly/oxmwalls.



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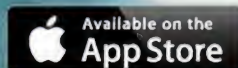


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NOW PLAYING... INJUSTICE: GODS AMONG US

Essential tips you must try

#1 It's a trap!

Destructive scenery is avoidable, but not blockable. If your opponent gets near anything they're able to trigger, back off.

#2 Don't get bullied

Never get backed into a corner - you'll be wide open to stage transitions. Use a grab to give yourself some space.

#3 Ocean wonder

Aquaman is a great character to keep foes at a safe distance, thanks to the considerable reach of his trident. Use him against heavy hitters like Bane and Grundy.

#4 Feeling super

Don't use a Super Move until you're sure your opponent can't counter with a Wager. Use it when their meter is empty.

#5 In the danger zone

Combat serial zoners with moves like Grundy's Swamp Hands, then move in quickly.

#6 Try winging it

Characters like Nightwing and Wonder Woman offer beginners great versatility in the ring, as they can constantly switch weapons and stances.

FOR MORE TIPS VISIT WWW.OXM.CO.UK

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Great graphics, but the controls are rubbish.

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How to...

Your guide to getting the best Achievements and in-game extras

FIND THE LEGENDARY WEAPONS IN **ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES**



HICKS' SHOTGUN

In Mission 1, when you're exploring the gravity well with O'Neal, there'll be a point when you're on the top floor and have to defend him from aliens as he opens a door. Once you do this, check the side rooms instead of going straight on and you'll find Hicks' shotgun.



GORMAN AND HUDSON'S WEAPONS

In Mission 4 you'll reach a door you have to cut open to proceed. Instead, check out the path to the left of O'Neal to see Gorman's pistol on a table. Then, in Mission 5, when you take the elevator up to meet O'Neal check the offices there to find Hudson's pulse rifle.



VASQUEZ'S SHOTGUN AND PISTOL

In Mission 6 you'll reach an area full of shipping containers. Head down the stairs to the garage area, kill all the aliens and soldiers, then look at the crates to find Vasquez's shotgun. Her pistol can be found in Mission 9 – just as you enter Hadley's Hope, turn left and follow the path.



FROST'S FLAMETHROWER

You'll find this in Mission 10. During the objective in which you have to destroy the third AA gun, you'll find a container holding a rocket launcher. Look behind that in the same burning container to find Frost's flamethrower, sitting there minding its own business.

FIND THE SKYRIM REFERENCE IN **WALKING DEAD: SURVIVAL INSTINCT**

Did you buy *The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct* thinking it was the great adventure game and not the atrocious shooter? Cheer yourself up by firing your cross-bow at a zombie's knee. If it hits, you'll get the 'I used to be a human like you' Achievement, parodying the 'arrow in the knee' line from *Skyrim*. Take the arrow out for a second Achievement called 'Mind if I borrow this?'.



FIND AND DESTROY THE LATIN GEARS OF WAR MUSIC IN **JUDGMENT**



The original *Gears of War* had a section where Marcus, irritated by some annoying Latin music, tells Baird to turn the radio off. In the Aftermath campaign in *Judgment*, activate the lift and take it to the nearby kitchen. After you kill all the enemies in the room, look for an old radio on a shelf. Listen carefully and you'll hear it's playing the same Latin music from the first game – destroy it and Cole will quip that Marcus would be proud of your actions.

FIND THE CROCODILE IN **CRYSIS 3**

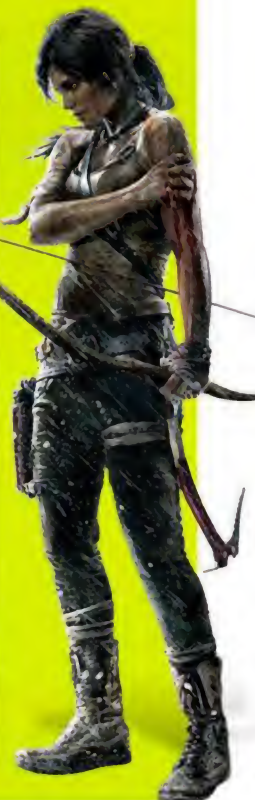
On Mission 3, in the right-hand corner of the C3 map square, you'll find a fish lying on top of a large pipe in the water. Walk over to it and pick it up, but immediately backtrack because a massive crocodile bursts from the pipe as soon as you do. Actually, don't worry too much, because it doesn't harm you. You can't harm it either, mind – it's completely invincible, meaning you can freely surf it down the river.



"Tempt the crocodile out of the pipe in *Crysis 3* and use him to surf down the river"

GET THE CRAB CAKES ACHIEVEMENT IN **TOMB RAIDER**

Crab Cakes is a hidden Achievement, so it's not clear what you have to do to get it. The answer is simple – in the Shipwreck Beach section towards the end of the game, run around looking at the sand until you see a crab. Shoot it with your bow and you'll get the Achievement, along with the devastating message that FeeFee the crab has been killed. It doesn't need to be a specific crab, the first one you kill will always be FeeFee.





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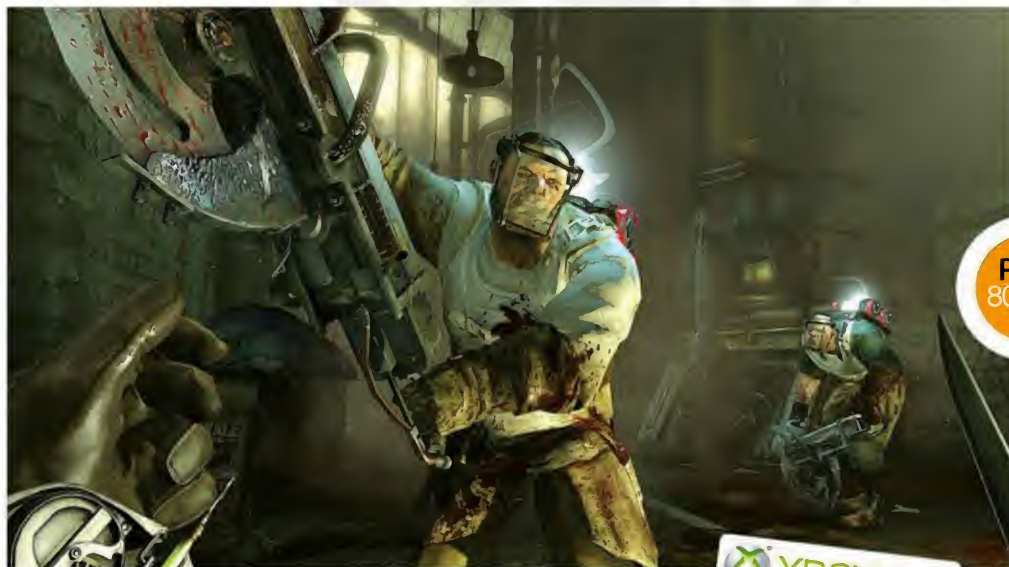


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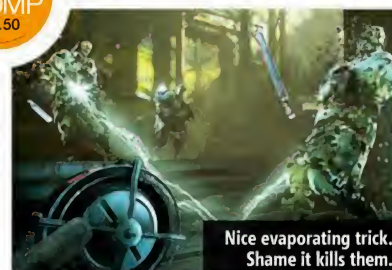
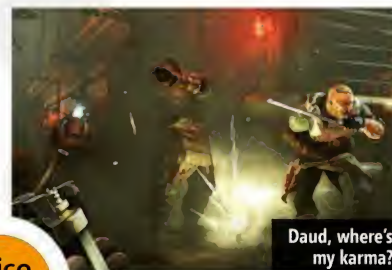


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800MP
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XBOX 360
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MUST BUY!

Dishonored The Knife of Dunwall

We're 'avin a whale of a time

In departing from original hero Corvo and casting you as his nemesis, the Empress-killing Daud, *The Knife of Dunwall* gives itself room to breathe. You'll witness familiar events from extremely different perspectives, whilst seeing more of Dunwall's detestable underbelly. Most importantly, the world's key occurrences are given more depth, rather than stretching one character's extraneous sub-stories too thin for this expansion to handle.

This perspective switch is clear from the opening assassination – the same murder that spurs Corvo's quest for revenge. Wracked by guilt and determined to uncover the mystery behind

the name Delilah, Daud goes in search of answers. It's a compelling story from bloody start to abrupt end, and Daud is everything that Corvo wasn't. He has a voice, and an unmistakable presence that Corvo lacked. Where Corvo was a blank slate, Daud arrives fleshed-out, and the story is better for it.

Straight to the point

Choice is still everywhere, from major objectives to your personal play style.

Daud has fewer powers, but new gear like arc mines and smoke bombs, and the ability to summon an assassin, fill the gap. Tweaks have been made to Daud's powers, too. Blinking now freezes you in stasis when used in mid-air, and x-ray vision requires unlocking. Level design

still invites experimentation, but your tool set nudges you towards combat rather than stealth. The tougher difficulty means you'll likely rely on trial and error to get the perfect stealth run, and Daud's arsenal often feels against you if you're not getting into bloody combat.

If there's anything that vanilla *Dishonored* could have offered more of, it's Dunwall. With two new locations – a stinking whale slaughterhouse, and an area called the legal district – you get some excellent new places to see, so it's disappointing to retread ground in the final mission. It's also confusing to have such an unsatisfying ending when the initial intrigue is so powerful. Granted, Daud's conclusion comes later in a future DLC expansion, but *The Knife of Dunwall* is quite obviously severed in two, and the story never gets into its stride. Another lengthy wait, then, but any chance to see more Dunwall and we'll come blinkin'.

I'm beginning to think we'll never find Jonah.



Auditioning for the live-action *Sailor Moon* TV show, are we?

Frequently tweeted: "it just sort of... ends."



XBOX 360 VERDICT
THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

THE SCORE
Best bits of *Dishonored*, but ending is lacking

8



A-listers battle the dead, for some reason.



Some zombies enjoy SM. Deal with it.

Call of Duty: Black Ops II Uprising

From the ashes

So that's Ray Liotta and Michael Madsen, escaping a zombie-filled Alcatraz? Well, someone's got a bit of money knocking about, eh.

Uprising includes Hollywood-studded Mob of the Dead, the latest tweak to the ever-improving CoD zombie formula. There's also a strange Afterlife mode, which lets you blast the undead as an invulnerable ghost. But this doesn't score points, and you need points to progress, so ghostly overkill might leave you stranded.

Apart from 1950s zombies, there are four new maps: Studio is a Hollywood-themed reworking of the old Firing Range map, with cover that's flimsier than it looks; Encore is set in London, on

an open-air rock festival; Magma is set in a Japanese town reminiscent of a close quarters *Battlefield* map; and Vertigo is set on top of a Mumbai Skyscraper. This is the most traditionally CoDmap,

but when you're up against a rock concert and a Hollywood film set, that's not saying much.

Uprising is a gimmicky but fun mix of fan service. The A-list talent seems utterly needless, but that's CoD for you.

Price
1,200MP
£9.75

XBOX 360 VERDICT
THE SCORE
You've already got it, haven't you? **8**



Assassin's Creed III The Redemption

The dying days of the cuckoo King

At first we were perplexed by *ACIII's* alternate-reality DLC campaign, but after an uninspired mid-section the grand finale makes it all worthwhile.

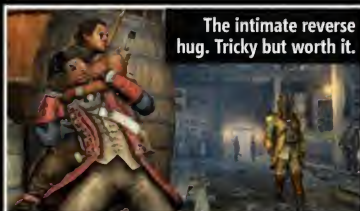
You're thrown back to the helm of the Aquila, facing down a Bluecoat armada. You've barely wiped the salt from your eyes before you're swashbuckling your way back to New York, carving up targets, slaughtering armies, and smashing your way through puzzles.

Ratonhnhaké:ton is still stealing impossible powers from the animal spirits, and his new bear-based melee is a decent addition.

Significant health costs do mean you can't take it for granted, so you're forced to mix up powers and tomahawking to succeed.

Is the ending as satisfactory as promised? Well, there are no huge surprises, but it's well executed. It's a joyride of the impossible, and the move away from historical accuracy has freed Ubisoft up to provide some truly unique moments.

Price
640MP
£5.20



The intimate reverse hug. Tricky but worth it.

XBOX 360 VERDICT
THE SCORE
Who knew regicide was such fun? **8**

XBOX 360
MUST BUY!

Also Released

CITADEL DOWN, SHUTADEL UP

The leader of the Grimmoc, Big Mama, has run off with a Seraphim artefact. Help by buying the *Jungle Hunt* DLC (400MP) for *Sacred Citadel*. Not expensive, but not recommended either.



FREEWHEELING

Petrolheads rejoice! *Forza Horizon's* 1000 Club Expansion Pack adds new challenges for every car, new Achievements, and two brand new sets of wheels – the 1995 RUF CTR2 and a 1956 Ford F100 – all for Free.

SMALL WONDER

Who said big is better? Arcade hit *Guardians of Middle-Earth* is offering the hairy-footed Frodo as a good-aligned warrior class character for a hobbit-sized 160MP.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Square Enix is forever finding things for Lara to leap and hunt through. *Tomb Raider's* 1939 Multiplayer Map Pack adds a military hangar and a forest meadow for 320MP.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Still at Level 50? Move aside, puny minion. Pandora's box is now offering an extra 11 levels, new weapons and extra gear with the *Borderlands 2* Ultimate Vault Hunter Upgrade Pack, which can be all yours for 400MP.

TOTAL ANNIHILATION

Slash your way through Colorado as *Metal Gear Rising* baddie Samuel Rodriguez. *Jetstream's* reused assets and short gameplay make it a bit of a stretch at 800MP, though.

BUSTY BRAWLER

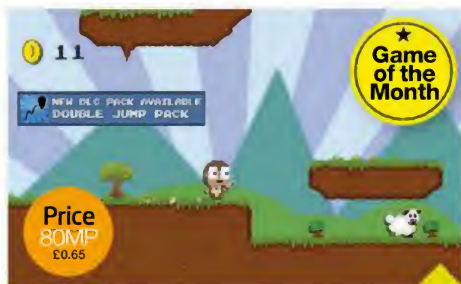
There's been a two-part makeover for the *Anarchy Reigns* multiplayer: you can either slaughter your friends in style as femme fatale Bayonetta for a svelte 240MP, or mix up the murder with co-op survival and aerial battle modes for 160MP.



Indie Games

The latest releases on Xbox Live Marketplace

You can find Xbox Live Indie Games by going to the Games tab and choosing [Browse Games > Indie](#)



DLC Quest

DEVELOPER: Going Loud Studios

This may be a one-note joke about exploitative microtransactions, but it's attached to a plucky Metroidvania platformer. The spoofery wears thin, but not before cracking a few good jokes.

RATING ★★★★★



Battle High 2

DEVELOPER: Mattrified

Competent fighting game with a huge roster of interesting idiosyncratic characters. The pixel-art doesn't quite do the mechanics justice, though – it looks decent when still, but the animations don't always communicate attacks clearly.

RATING ★★★★★



Marble Masters: The Pit

DEVELOPER: Polyart

A physics-enabled sphere-on-sphere deathmatch, in which you roll into opponents and try to knock them to their death. There's a range of oddly-shaped arenas, obstacles and hazards, but the challenge remains slight and samey.

RATING ★★★★★



Constellation

DEVELOPER: AlecVickers

Here you slingshot the moon between stars, exploiting gravity wells to loop back and forth through interstellar gates before the time runs out. It's clumsy and a little dull, but it gets muted applause for not being another *Galaga* clone.

RATING ★★★★★



Bulkhead

DEVELOPER: Raoghard

Tedious FPS fare in which you stalk the gantries of a space station rooting through crates and occasionally dying in stodgy low-energy gun-battles. Its only benefit is making *Aliens: Colonial Marines* look less awful. Flush it out the airlock.

RATING ★★★★★



Candies vs Hypnodeer

DEVELOPER: Shake Well Games Ltd

A cutesy cartoon style sugar-coats this match-three puzzler, but bite into it and you find an all-too spongy design. You connect similar confections together, merging them into new treats, but this cakey hierarchy is entirely unintuitive.

RATING ★★★★★

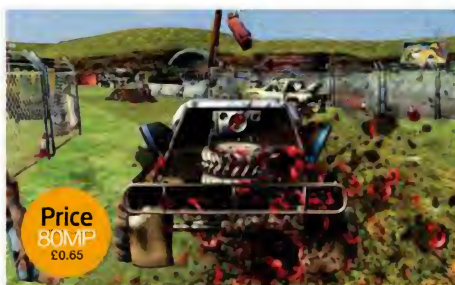


Master of the Seven Teas

DEVELOPER: Gaslight Games

One of those three stars is just for the name. Alas, this nautically-themed arena shmup is otherwise sluggish and rather unfair – the viewing angle makes depth hard to gauge and giant killer-tea-spoons scupper even the most talented skipper.

RATING ★★★★★

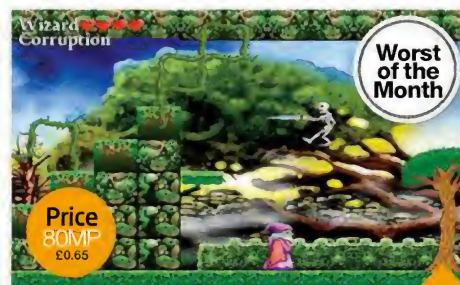


Zombie Racer

DEVELOPER: DennisMac

Plough over zombies to get boosts in this shonky racing game. There's no sense of collision, traction or speed, and the jumbled, busy tracks are hard to interpret. If *Forza* is the Lamborghini of racers, this is just a skid mark.

RATING ★★★★★



Mythos Castle

DEVELOPER: Venables Games

This dismal platformer's crimes are numerous and basic, starting with controls so flabby they deserve their own exploitative reality-TV sob-story.

RATING ★★★★★

Xbox Movies

The latest films available for download on Xbox Live



Rise of the Guardians

STARRING: Chris Pine, Hugh Jackman
DIR: Peter Ramsey

Think of *Rise of the Guardians* as like *The Avengers*, for kids. Except *The Avengers* was already for kids, so actually it's more like *The Avengers* for slightly smaller kids, as well as less cynical older ones, and dads with an eye on the Tooth Fairy's feathery hot pants. Fairies! That's an important part – it's also like a fairytale *Avengers*, where instead of super soldiers and tin men there are folk heroes and seasonal icons. The fun twisty bit being how violent (yet still warm and lovable) they all are: Santa is a two-bladed Cossack swordsman, Easter Bunny an outback warrior. Rounding out the *Avengers* parallel, they're pitted against a snarling English villain, in this instance Jude Law's enjoyable prep school bully Bogey Man, and their greatest hope is a fresh, Puck-ish, Iron Man-ish new recruit, Jack Frost. It's fast and fun and nimbly weaves various mythical threads into a convincing, more-than-a-Christmas-cash-in whole.

RATING ★★★★★

"Like a fairytale *Avengers*,
but with folk heroes
instead of super soldiers"



WATCH THIS IF YOU ENJOYED ULTIMATE MARVEL VS CAPCOM 3

In which characters you wouldn't have expected throw down in even less expected but entertaining ways with characters from entirely different fictional universes.



Taken 2

STARRING: Liam Neeson, Maggie Grace **DIR:** Olivier Megaton

In a reprise of that *Austin Powers* gag where henchmen have grieving families, it turns out all the rapey white slavers in the first *Taken* left behind sad relatives when Liam Neeson punched their souls out. So now he gets to do the same thing to their cousins, who repeat the "grab the girl" trick of the first film having apparently not noticed how good Neeson is at punching.

RATING ★★★★★



Here Comes The Boom

STARRING: Kevin James, Salma Hayek **DIR:** Frank Coraci

A teacher starts cagefighting as the most obvious way to save The Fonz's job as head of his school's music program. It's a deeply stupid idea made bearable by Kevin James' well-practised lovable stocky guy routine, his annoyingly charming romance with Salma Hayek, and his band of misfit pals who, as well as Henry Winkler, include an aerobics-teaching Dutch MMA monster.

RATING ★★★★★



The Hunt

STARRING: Mads Mikkelsen, Thomas Bo Larsen **DIR:** Thomas Vinterberg

Reflective Danish drama about a preschool teacher affected by a spiralling accusation of abuse. It's not the raw subject matter under examination, though, but the details of its impact – reactions of strangers, parents, friends, and the damage done to relationships with supporters and accusers. Sounds fun, right? And really Danish. It's heavy but worthwhile.

RATING ★★★★★



Safe House

STARRING Ryan Reynolds, Denzel Washington **DIR** Daniel Espinosa

This wavy-handed spy thriller gives Reynolds and Washington plenty of room to play to their respective strengths: Reynolds is the rookie in a dangerous situation who CAN'T QUITE BELIEVE ANY OF THIS IS HAPPENING, and Washington is the smooth talking, half-smiling old hand who might be bad but who we like anyway. Predictable, trashy, better than shutting your eyes.

RATING ★★★★★

Power pals Superteam assembling

THE INCREDIBLES

An outside shot for Pixar's best film – a celebration of family, a masterclass of cartoon action and a superhero blockbuster about a super family forced out of retirement to save the world.



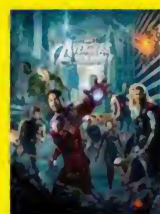
THE EXPENDABLES

A thoroughly bicep'd action hero veteran's parade that sees a whole shelf of Blockbuster Video combining for a single mission to kill a corrupt South American dictator.



MARVEL AVENGERS ASSEMBLE

Mega-chess that's been skilfully played with giant box-office pieces to fantastic, dazzling, era-of-cinema-defining effect. So, in other words, pretty good.



OXM investigates...

Making Cutscenes

You watch them, you skip them, but do you know how they make them?

Words: Craig Owens

Younger readers might find this hard to believe, but there was a time when if you wanted to know about a game's story, you had open the instruction manual and read the flimsy narrative pretext for your abstract fun hidden within.

These days, of course, if you want to know about a game's story you, well, you don't have much choice. Cutscenes open games, punctuate them and close them - conveying both mechanical and plot-critical information while trying their hardest to look good doing it. As graphics have improved, cutscenes have got shinier, with voice acting and facial animation developing to the point where motion capture technology can digitise the entirety of an actor's performance in a single take.

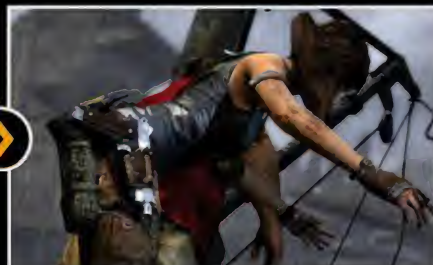
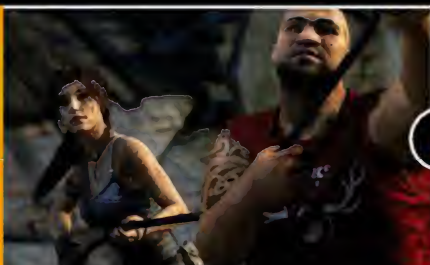
Indeed, improved animation tech - and players' Hollywood-informed notions of what a game's talky bits should look like - has led to many studios drafting in outside help from experts in the art of digital direction. Activision, for instance, uses London-based animation firm Spov to make the *Modern Warfare* series' complex CGI-briefings as well the *Black Ops* franchise's more traditional cutscenes. *Halo* developer 343 Industries, meanwhile, hired production firm Axis Animation to make the cutscenes for its *Spartan Ops* DLC. Axis is perhaps best known for its powerfully emotional trailer for the original *Dead Island*, in which a postcard-perfect family holiday is cruelly cut short by a mixture of zombies, temporal distortion and poignant violin music.

That trailer is the perfect symbol of both the benefits and risks of drafting in outside help. It's expertly produced and genuinely affecting - and no one can doubt what a successful piece of marketing it was. But it's also weirdly removed from the reality of *Dead Island* as a game, and arguably wasn't a very accurate advert for the experience.

A cut above

The CGI *Spartan Ops* cutscenes have been similarly criticised for feeling disconnected from the actual missions. "To an extent they're designed to be different but complimentary experiences that play to the strengths of the two mediums," says Axis director Stuart Aitken. "Our pre-rendered episodes focus on characterisation and plot,

STARRING ROLE
Lara Croft is played by Brit actor Camilla Luddington



THE TRICKS OF IN-ENGINE CUTSCENES

The stuff cutscenes can do that in-game cannot



DEPTH OF FIELD This is great way to guide your eyes to either the foreground or the background of a scene, by blurring the parts you're not focusing on. This cinematic technique doesn't really work during gameplay, since players need to be able to choose what they focus on.



EXTRA DETAILED CHARACTER MODELS Unlike cutscenes, where you'll see scuffs on armour and lines on faces, in-game heroes look more like plastic action figures. The devs know you'll never be looking as closely outside of story sequences, so they don't waste resources.



ADVANCED FACIAL ANIMATION There are two pieces of facial tech mentioned in *Halo 4*'s credits. FaceGen isn't technically a cutscene specific tool; it's used to generate realistic models of faces from images. FaceFX is the tech that creates convincing real-time performances.

"Many developers draft in expert animation firms to create their cutscenes"

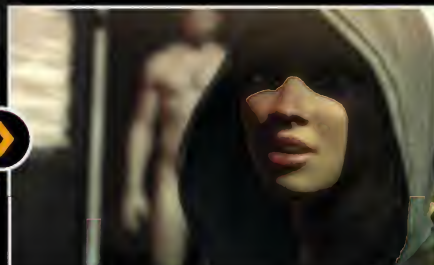
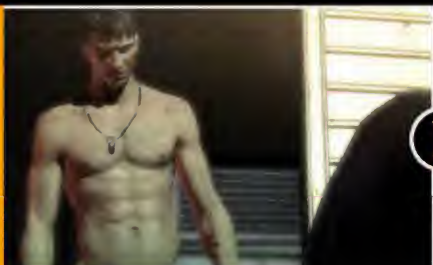
which are more effectively delivered via acted/animated performances, whereas the game missions focus on the action elements that suit the nature of *Halo*'s game engine. But there is a lot of work on things like lighting, VFX and sound and so on to make sure the world we portray is the same one the player plays in - we are essentially sharing the same assets, using the same actors, the scripts are written by the same teams."

Of course, extremely high production value CGI cutscenes are actually a rarity: most of the time studios trust the game engine to do the work - as 343 did with the majority of *Halo 4*'s campaign cutscenes. There are advantages to this approach. Firstly, everything looks consistent, with no awkward flipping between hyper-real CGI faces and

plainer in-game models or, even worse, sudden costume changes. The in-game models can be prettied up anyhow, as all the fancy effects that need to be dialed down during the action can be switched back on. The extra effects work and better-textured characters used during cinematics is why you can occasionally see cutscenes suffer from framerate drops and slowdown - the game engine is stuttering under the strain of the improved visuals. On a more practical note, in-engine cutscenes are useful because pre-rendered video can take up an awful amount of precious disc space.

Unless game studios and publishers stop trying to emulate Hollywood, cutscenes aren't likely to disappear. Indeed, more time, money and effort is going to be spent on them.

STARRING ROLE
Tim Philipps plays DmC's new Dante



Online Review

Revisiting games to see how they stand up on Xbox Live



Gears of War Judgment

It's Survival of the fittest as Epic plays the Beast

AS THE CROW FLIES

Each of the four purpose-built levels of Survival and OverRun can be leveraged in different ways. Scouts can climb up to crow's nests, while Tickers can take shortcuts through tunnels.

What you'll need to be wary of as you don your best Locust-stomping jackboots and jump into *Judgment's* multiplayer is that Epic's been over everything with a fine-toothed comb – and some revisions might not suit you.

Both Beast and Horde mode, for starters, have been replaced. Survival mode sees a team of up to five human players (or bots, if you want) defend a string of Emergence Hole covers from increasingly powerful waves of Locust, while OverRun, furthering the concept,

plants human players on both squads. Think *Battlefield's* Rush gametype with added chainsaws.

Fans might well bemoan the removal of modes Beast and Horde, but the substitutions are basically like-for-like: OverRun offers the Locust-controlling thrills of the former; Survival the wave-based defence of the latter.

It's easy to forget, as you fill a slot on the Locust team and gleefully detonate your Ticker in a crowd, or splurge banked cash on a Rager to charge an E-Hole (he's the only new Locust type, resembling a mini Berserker),

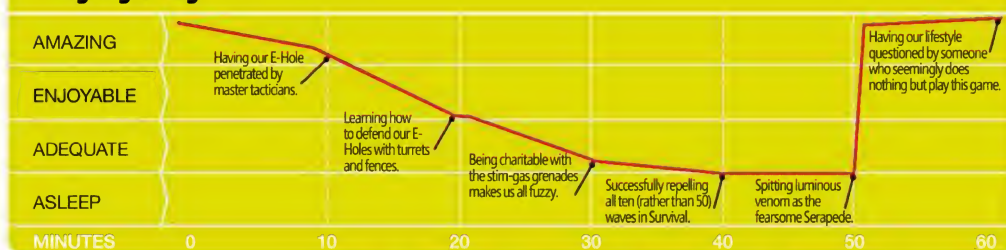
that amidst the chaos, *Gears* is still one of the most finely balanced multiplayer experiences out there.

Locust still come in tiers, for example, with better monsters costing more money, but the human side has been revised. Both OverRun and Survival introduce classes – Medics, Soldiers, Engineers and Scouts contributing to a more co-operative atmosphere. *Judgment* smartly compels teamwork: chuck a beacon grenade as a Scout and it'll highlight enemies through walls, helping team-mates get a bead and easing pressure on you. Engineers who plant turrets and repair barriers benefit not just themselves, but the whole squad.

Play us!

Thursday
16 May at 6pm.
Message
OXM ETBoy
for an invite

Play by Play Our First Hour



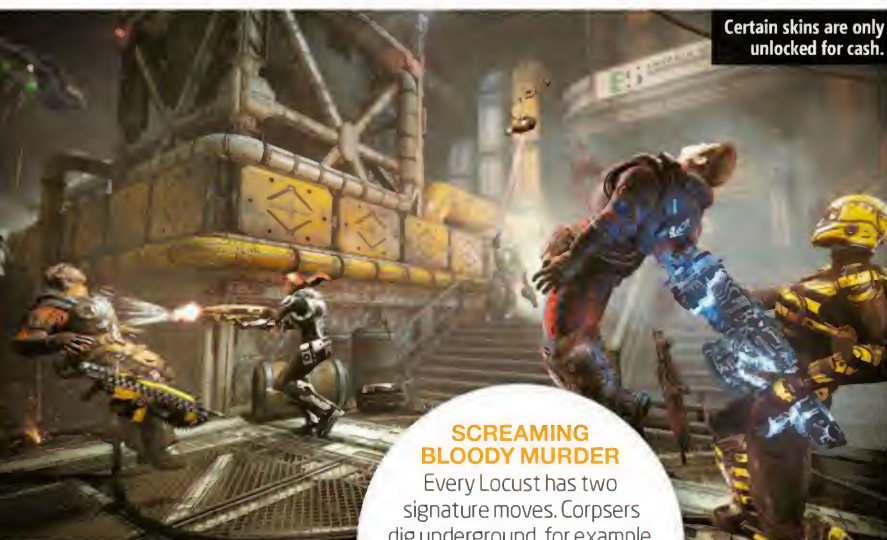
All eight maps, like this rig, look gorgeous.



Details



In short:
A prequel, the fourth entry in Epic's meatheaded third-person shooter series sees Damon Baird and his squad stand trial as they defend Sera – and their honour.
Released: Mar 2013
Score: 8/10



Certain skins are only unlocked for cash.

SCREAMING BLOODY MURDER

Every Locust has two signature moves. Corpser dig underground, for example, while Wretches shriek to momentarily freeze foes. Best is the Mauler, who spins his metal shield like a meat grinder.



Boom! And he's not coming back from that.



Such is the balance, even Tickers are useful.

Don't think *Judgment's* any easier than the last *Gears* games, however. Like before, this is fast, hard and unforgiving, and nowhere is this clearer than in Free-For-All, the third and final new gametype. Self-explanatory, it further exemplifies Epic's willingness to trim the fat. Both executions and the down-but-not-out mechanic have been nixed to speed things up, while a tap of LB launches grenades without hassle (you can't craftily stick them on walls this time either). Further ensuring unqualified fairness, all character models are COG. "Right you lot," Epic's saying. "There's no way you can possibly moan now."

It wouldn't be a *Gears* game without a little passionate indignation, however, and in *Judgment* you'll be saved by a healing stim-gas grenade as often as you'll be called a Hammerburst whore. *Gears* fans are passionate – we get that. These are people that pay actual money for weapon skins (admittedly the ones

"Judgment subtracts with one hand, but adds with the other"



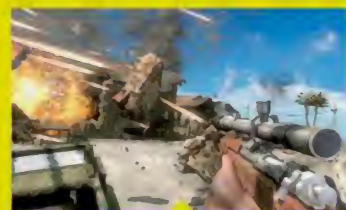
here, including Tron lights, hippy swirls, neon piping and clown kits, are pretty cool). But they can often contribute to a hostile environment for newbies. Even us veterans, in our first OverRun match, were dominated by a single super-skilled opponent using only a Ticker. *Gears of War: Judgment* subtracts with one hand and adds with the other. Although several modes and mechanics have got the chop, new ones take their place in the fastest, fiercest and fairest *Gears* yet.

XBOX 360 VERDICT

LIVE RATING
Fast, fierce, not for the faint-hearted

8

Also Playing



Battlefield 1943

The littlest *Battlefield* game is still managing to thrive online despite its advancing years and lack of updates. The handful of maps may be small, but they're perfectly formed, and are sufficiently balanced that even the infuriatingly accomplished pilots aren't enough to make things unfair. It also, we have discovered, still works even when somebody else is using your WiFi connection to catch up on *Hollyoaks* on 4oD.

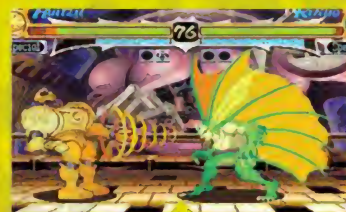
9



Counter-Strike: Condition Zero

Valve's latest, by contrast, seems to be struggling, with lag creeping into proceedings. There are no new modes or maps – but the old ones still deliver some of the purest man-shooting you can have on Xbox Live. No quick-scoping, care packages or perk loadouts here – it's all about skill and careful rationing of your earnings. Occasional stammer aside, it's an excellent shot of adrenaline.

8



Darkstalkers Resurrection

If you want a bit of flavour with your fighting, forsake Capcom's best-known fighting franchise in favour of one teeming with werewolves, Succubi, undead rock stars and mermen. Even hardened fight fans will find it a challenge. There's been no sign of lag on any of our online matches, so you've only yourself to blame if that difficulty curve proves to be too steep.

8

THE OXM Replay

It's been seven years since From Software first released **Chromehounds**. What do we mech of it now?



Publisher Sega
Developer
From Software
Release July 2006
Played by
Dan Grillopoulos



The original name might give something away about *Chromehounds* – phonetically, it's 'Kuromuhausen'. That's right, *Chromehounds* is Japanese in origin, having been created by From Software (*Dark Souls*) way back in 2006. It's a mech game set in a fictional mid-Asian region, on the borders between three well-armed nations – think Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan for a real-world example – that all employ mechs amongst the regular troops of their army.

Single-player found few fans, even during the software drought of the time. Fans of the online mode used to compare it to watching paint dry, but a fairer description would be mixing paint. That takes into account the nerdy delights of attempting something new and failing, failing, failing until you just try something prepackaged instead, and then get into the mostly-boring and unfair missions. The single-player was mostly a tutorial for the multiplayer, giving you a range of pre-built robots for each mission, as well as unlocking parts so that you could try out your own custom robots for the later, tougher missions.

In the single-player, you take control of an unnamed mercenary



A rare fight between the backline radar units.

from Rafzekael who's been hired to help the country of Tarakia defend its borders. Over the course of six campaigns, it emerges that the relentless instability in the area of Neroimus has led the Kingdom of Sal Kar to build extra defences – something that triggers a war between the three nations. It's a mostly irrelevant plot told in an oddly hesitating... manner by the scripted... interlocutors.

Anyway, you're driving a 10-metre-tall robot! Great! Nah. It's a shame that you never really feel like you're driving a mech, more that you're driving a very oddly-shaped car or android that occasionally stands on leprechauns and toy tanks. The sense of scale just doesn't communicate itself properly without a proper sense of contrast. Especially given the thousand-metre pylons that dot the world and which are key to the metagame – these are the communication towers that need to be taken to allow players to receive mission details and communicate with allies.

There are special, weaker commander mech builds which carry portable communication terminals. Indeed, building

custom mechs is the main thing you learn from the single-player campaign. There's a huge range of parts and massive flexibility about how you connect them; you can have them facing all directions, attached to almost any other part, so it's not unusual to make mechs that just have guns piled up on them, mapped to any of four control sets.

However, the control system manages to be both intuitive and innovative. Most of the controls were standard FPS ones, but the right shoulder button flipped between your currently-selected weapon sets, with a little screen-in-screen at the top-right showing your current weapon cam. Pushing in the right stick switches that screen and the main screen, allowing for super-fine detail aiming at long range.

This was not so useful against the AI enemies (who we'll skip over rapidly) but it was extremely handy for the multiplayer mode. Called the Neroimus War and set after the single-player, this was probably the best ever developed for a Mech game. In fact, whisper it, it was probably the nearest thing that the Xbox 360 has ever had to an action MMO.



Night missions combined flares and night vision.



Players joined squads, carried out missions on a huge campaign map to capture each other's bases and, over the course of a few months, could thoroughly massacre opponents from other factions, to the extent of forcing them to surrender entirely. Then, with more components unlocked, the whole game would start again. Those components could go towards better and better mechs, with all sorts of different strategies. Sadly, Sega shut the multiplayer mode down in 2010, to howls of discontent from remaining loyal players.

Following the death of *MechWarrior* developer FASA, From Software is now the only developer still in the mech game, thanks to its now-annual franchise *Armored Core*. Here's hoping the success of *Dark Souls* doesn't keep From from keeping the giant robots coming.

XBOX CLASSICS WHY YOU SHOULD PLAY...

DOOM 3

PUB: BETHESDA // DEV: ID
RELEASE: APRIL 2005

DOOM 3? ISN'T THAT THE RUBBISH ONE?

No! Well, it's not the one that single-handedly popularised and demonised a genre. It's not the game that was so popular that it became shorthand for all shooters in the same way *Call of Duty* does today. But it wasn't rubbish. The Xbox version was ported by Vicarious Visions, which did a great job of squeezing it into the old Xbox.

BUT IT WAS DARK, WASN'T IT?

Well, yes. It was criticised for that. But then again, what's more atmospheric than a bit of darkness? And it meant that you got a chance to see the fireballs coming. The fireballs that virtually every enemy shot at you.

WELL THAT DOESN'T SOUND PARTICULARLY COOL.

You're kidding! Side-stepping fireballs is what first-person shooters are all about! And if you really want variety, the Revenants shoot homing rockets. Those rockets will soon make you regret wishing that there was something other than fireballs!

DOES IT ALL BODE WELL FOR DOOM 4?

Hmmph. We'd have preferred *RAGE 2*, to be honest. It's a real shame that that game was canned by Bethesda – but then again, we don't know what was going on at id. If it took some of the AI personality out of *RAGE* and put it into those demonic hordes, then maybe this whole "hell portal on Mars" shtick could get back on its legs. Just, you know, change the cacodemon back to the hovering cyclops. We didn't like ol' toothy chops.



"While the single-player was poor, the MP was highly rated"



Meanwhile in OXM

Issue 40 | March 2005

Never mind *Doom* – a two-page ad for *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* reminds us all of a time when people were making *TimeSplitters*.

A six-page tips section taught everyone how to succumb to the lure of the dark side in *KOTOR II*. Apparently, it's all about double lightsabers and lots of Flurrying.

Two pages of hideous ads invited you to "pull tasty girls" and "listen to flirty girls". In the corner was a lonely advert for the Speedseat, a racing peripheral. Miserable days.

The Punisher scored 8.4 on its strength as an in-your-face blaster. The advert on the back page asked "what does it feel like to drill the head of the punk who stole your family from you?"

The first ever Interactive World Cup took place in Zurich, with competitors playing in an inflatable football pod. FIFA fans will know it's still going to this day.

Most lightguns won't work on new TVs, which is why we don't get to review anything like the Logic 3 Assault Rifle these days. Back then? A chunky 4/5.

The Hot Topic let readers vote on the hottest female character on Xbox. 52% said *Dead or Alive's* Kasumi. Apart from the eye-rolling lad-mag behaviour, the slice of the pie chart was clearly smaller than 50%. Unforgivable.

Xbox 360 Must Buy

Our selection of the finest games currently available

KINECT **K**

XBOX LIVE ARCADE **A**



The Elder Scrolls: Skyrim

Imagine *Oblivion* with better levelling, better characters, better fighting and a gripping tale of dragon-based apocalypse. Hi, *Skyrim*!

10



Deus Ex: Human Revolution

This cyberpunk RPG/shooter hybrid has an unparalleled sense of depth and scope. If you're a sci-fi fan, this is unmissable stuff.

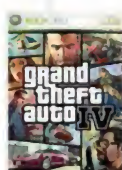
10



Project Gotham Racing 4

THE BEST RACING GAME EVER. Is that something of a final statement, do you think? We like to have the last word.

10



Grand Theft Auto IV

With DLC like *The Lost and Damned* to keep you entertained, there's even more reason to pay Liberty City a visit. Just brilliant.

10



Minecraft

After you've spent an afternoon making a castle, you'll finally understand what all the hype was about. The split-screen mode is utterly brilliant.

10



Sleeping Dogs

A canny magpie that's stolen the best bits from a range of games, this combines *Batman*, *GTA* and overblown action combat. Unexpectedly brilliant.

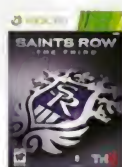
9



FIFA 13

Not quite the leap forward that last year managed, and *PES* is snapping at its heels, but this is still the best football game you can get on Xbox 360.

9



Saints Row: The Third

The most outrageously silly game we've seen in years. It's a rough-edged *GTA* played for laughs – rarely in the best possible taste, but always entertaining.

9



Forza 4

The best pure racing simulation on Xbox 360, and possibly anywhere. The franchise has everything except a sense of humour, which it has licenced from *Top Gear*.

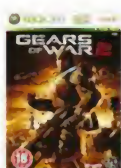
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Blur

Bizarre Creations' decision to shed the *PGR* franchise for a new purebred arcade racer paid off nicely with two excellent career modes.

9



Gears of War 2

Still our favourite *Gears* title – it has the most interesting campaign of the four and the still-interesting multiplayer invented the now industry-standard Horde mode.

9



The Orange Box

The best package on Xbox 360, bar none. Two great shooters and a stunning puzzle game: we can't think of a better way to invest your money.

9



YOURS FOR £10 DISCOUNT GAMES WORTH GETTING

▶ **STRANGLEHOLD** > A sequel to John Woo's 1992 film *Hard Boiled*, *Stranglehold* takes the phrase 'all guns blazing' to heart – and then puts it in a headlock. It may be short, silly and lacking in polish, but any game that allows us to reproduce Woo's signature "doves as if from nowhere" trademark is a-okay in our books.

Score: 8/10

Buy it: £9.49, Amazon



Left 4 Dead 2

Valve's superlative multiplayer architects have created another zombie-mashing classic. More varied campaigns and new weapons await you.

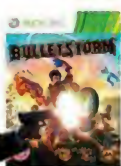
9



Rayman Origins

The ageless, limless wonder is back for a bout of four-player co-op platforming fun. Go on, give in to your childish side just this once – this is ace.

9



Bulletstorm

Not nearly as stupid as it pretends to be, *Bulletstorm* packs an impressive, breakneck-paced story mode and still has time to include Skillshots in the mix.

9



XCOM: Enemy Unknown

Intense tactics with a personal twang, *XCOM* is an oddly emotional strategy game. Tough, deep, and surprisingly addictive. Don't miss it.

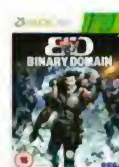
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Trials Evolution

Just as unmissable as the original, but with better tracks and nicer graphics. It's got levels based on *Inception* and *Limbo* in it, too. Icing on the cake.

8



Binary Domain

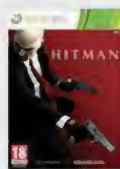
Japan's answer to *Gears of War* features OTT characters, awesome headshots, and boss fights like nothing you've ever seen before. Must-play stuff.

8

DEPARTING THIS MONTH

SO LONG, AND THANKS:
THE GAME WE'RE
REMOVING FROM THE LIST

Hitman: Absolution
The online Contracts are excellent, but the fractured single-player missions aren't nearly as much fun to revisit as *Blood Money's*.



"The Walking Dead delivers some of the most powerful storytelling around"



Portal 2

Valve turns a series of sci-fi test chambers into the funniest game you'll ever play – and includes what is probably the most satisfying co-op, too.

10



BioShock

The latest, *Infinite*, is excellent but if you're new to the series you have to start here. The world of Rapture still captivates, and the second-act twist offsets the dull ending.

10



Mass Effect 3

Those diving in at the end won't get the same impact, but for fans of the series this is sublime. A brilliant end to the best RPG trilogy ever.

10



The Walking Dead Season 1

Telltale's interactive drama only just counts as a game, but it manages to deliver some of the most powerful storytelling around. Get it on XBLA or in stores.

9



Dishonored

A genuine first-person classic that you'll want to play through at least twice. A near-perfect blend of stealth and action, set in a fantastic world.

9



Condemned: Criminal Origins

A dark and unpleasant CSI 'em up from the Xbox 360's earliest days which still stands playing today.

9



Batman: Arkham City

The Dark Knight's first open-world outing is a superb smash-hit. Have Alfred iron your very best cape and come and get involved.

9



Kinect Sports: Season Two

We never thought pretending to play darts could be quite as much fun as this. Rare's mastery of all Kinect's tech shines through.

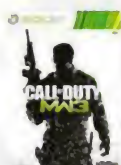
9



Far Cry 3

Take the brilliant scale of *Far Cry 2*, remove the awful checkpoints, and set it somewhere beautiful and green. You've got yourself an unmissable shooter.

9



Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3

Same addictive multiplayer, paired with a bombastic story that actually makes sense this time. The Xbox Live essential.

9



Dark Souls

Devastatingly evil but utterly compelling. *Dark Souls* is a love letter to fans of old-school gaming. Think you're hardcore? Get this in your life.

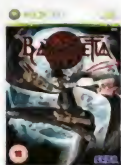
9



Red Dead Redemption

Not merely *GTA* with cowboys, the gripping story, beautiful world and brilliant characters make this the best cowpoke game ever. Multiplayer's fun, too.

9



Bayonetta

Sega's saucy witch has utterly seduced us, with action that just keeps increasing in scale until your head explodes in a shower of sparks and confetti.

9



Mark of the Ninja

Forget other so-called stealth games, this 2D ninjathon is the real deal – yet it avoids the frustration that's so common in the genre. A modern classic.

9



Halo Wars

Halo as you've never seen it before – through the eyes of a commander hovering over the battlefield. It's the thinking person's *Halo* game.

9



Borderlands 2

A huge world, some amazing weapons and an excellent script make this one of the best co-op adventures you can have. Get your ass to Pandora.

9



BattleBlock Theater

Forget the pure masochism of *Meat Boy* – this platformer is a powerful distillation of joy. It took The Behemoth years to make – and every day shows. It's brilliant.

9

NEW ENTRY



Skulls of the Shogun

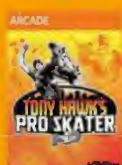
A funny and smart turn-based strategy gem that riffs off classic games like *Advance Wars* on the Game Boy. If you've exhausted *XCOM*, play this next.

9

THE LIVE WEEKENDER

THREE GREAT BUYS FOR UNDER 2,100 MICROSOFT POINTS

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD
Worth it for the nostalgia-inducing soundtrack alone, but if you're like us you'll lose hours trying to hit the top of the scoreboards.



Price: 1,200 MP

Swarm
We admit it – we find it hilarious sending these poor blue blobs to their doom. Does that make us bad people? Maybe, but *Swarm's* still a fun little game.



Price: 400 MP

Feeding Frenzy
Chomp your way to the top of the food chain from the bottom of the sea. *Feeding Frenzy* won't provide much of a challenge, but it's still entertaining.



Price: 400 MP



Kinect Party

Kinect is at its best when it's not taking itself too seriously. *Kinect Party* is a fantastic example of family-based antics and pleasant daftness.

8



Super Street Fighter IV

With ten new characters added to the roster, fans of the *Street Fighter* series won't fail to enjoy this new 'super' offering. The best fighter on Xbox 360.

8

ARE YOU A STEALTH HERO?

Stealth's a lot more exciting than it used to be. Take our quiz to find out if a life of espionage is for you

1 You've been assigned to infiltrate an enemy outpost deep in the Kandahar desert. What gear will you equip?

A: Sand camo, a few knives and rations. All other weapons can be procured on-site.

B: Several assault rifles, a fruitbowl's worth of grenades and some sand camo, because you have to make it *look* like you're trying to be stealthy, don't you?

C: You pre-ordered the Limited Edition boxset, so you're kitted out in a comical Raving Rabbid costume, with a gun that screams "BWAAAAAAA!" when reloading.



2 You arrive at your destination but - oh no! - there's a sentry guard patrolling the perimeter. You need to slip past him - but how?

A: Scour the immediate area for alternative routes, observe his movement patterns and sneak past when his back is turned.

B: Plonk a grot mag on the floor and casually stroll past him while he's engrossed in the festival of knockers before him.

C: Force feed a nearby camel enough C4 to send the Earth into a collision course with the Sun, and then let it amble in the guard's general direction.

3 You're at the front door, but have no idea how many people are behind it. Your next move?

A: Slip a fibre-optic camera under the door and see for yourself.

B: Lob a rock through the window and count how many people repeat such classic lines as: "Did you hear something?" and "Hmm. Must have been my imagination" before proceeding.

C: Call in an airstrike and determine the number of casualties via dental records during debriefing.

4 Right, you've got the intel and now know that you have to infiltrate some other base, because that's how videogame plots work. This one's a bit better guarded, though. Where will you choose to set up your sniping vantage point?

A: A cliff directly overlooking the village.

B: You pop in and out of a rock sitting 15-feet in front of the guards - never quite exposing yourself long enough for them to cotton on that they're being shot at.

C: Right under the guard's nose. Quickscooping for the win!



5 Your target's heavily guarded, and you won't get within knifing distance without a disguise. You plump for:

A: One of the deceased guard's uniforms, your face concealed by a balaclava.

B: A cardboard box, addressed for delivery to your target's bedroom.

C: An all-over body suit, stitched from the decomposing skin of your fallen foes.



6 Uh-oh! You've been rumbled. How do you intend to escape?

A: Break the enemies' line of sight and hide in a cupboard until they forget about you.

B: Dive into a bale of hay, or stand between a bunch of prostitutes.

C: Two words: sentry gun.

7 Now it's time to scamper. What do you use as your escape vehicle?

A: Slink out of Dodge by hiding in the back of a supply truck, and meet your teammates at the extraction point.

B: Hop onto the very helicopter that's trying to mow you down, then knife the pilot in the neck.

C: I dunno. Transform into a robot? Something that'll look good on the back of the box.

IF YOU MOSTLY ANSWERED...

A: You're yesterday's spy

Your approach to infiltration is resolutely old-school, and would not cut it in today's field. You'd bore onlookers rigid, and Kinect would pipe their snores directly to your opponent's lugholes, because Kinect is secretly on your console's side.

B: Better, but not quite better-er enough

You are well-read enough to know that there's more to stealth than being quiet and avoiding detection. The only blot on your notebook is your occasional tendency to crouch walk or peer round corners. That's known in the trade as 'faffing about'.

C: You are the stealthiest stealthier in Stealthington

Boom! You're like a ghost, whispering in and out of enemy bases, never leaving any witnesses behind because YOU'VE KILLED THEM ALL WITH FIRE. Congratulations - you're officially qualified to be a stealth-action hero.

Next issue of OXM on-sale 7 June. Subscribe and get a free game: see page 58 for details.



DOWNLOAD

FRIDAY 14 JUNE

Slipknot

BULLET FOR MY
VALENTINE

Koan

DOWN
PAPA ROACH
ASKING ALEXANDRIA
ARCHITECTS - RISE TO REMAIN

Black Stone Cherry

GOGOL BORDELLO
3 DOORS DOWN - VOLBEAT
EUROPE - DRAGONFORCE
URIAH HEPP - SKIN
DIR EN GREY

HIM

CONVERGE
MOTIONLESS IN WHITE - TURISAS
IN THIS MOMENT - THE SWORD
HANG THE BASTARD - PATENT PENDING
PALM READER - EMPEROR CHUNG

FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS - FIDLAR
THE ALGORITHM - VERSES
HAMMER OF THE GODS

SATURDAY 15 JUNE

**IRON
MAIDEN**
MAIDEN ENGLAND

Queens
of the
Stone Age

motorhead

ALICE IN CHAINS
MASTODON
BUCKCHERRY
YOUNG GUNS - UFO

ENCORE STAGE

**ENTER
SHIKARI**

JIMMY EAT WORLD
LIT - KARNIVOOL - KATATONIA
HARDCORE SUPERSTAR - ESCAPE THE FATE
HEAVEN'S BASEMENT - RED, WHITE & BLUES
I DIVIDE

MAX STAGE

THE HIVES

CHTHONIC - UNCLE ACID & THE DEADBEATS
BURY TOMORROW - WALKING PAPERS
HEART OF A COWARD - EMPRESS - NEKROGOBLIKON
CROWNS - EARTHTONE 9 - HILL VALLEY HIGH - BROKEN

STAGE
Red Bull Studios

AFTER THE BURIAL - LAST WITNESS
RAT ATTACK - VODOO SIX - SILENT SCREAMS
ASTROID BOYS - IDIOM - CYTOTA

SUNDAY 16 JUNE

RAMMSTEIN

THIRTY SECONDS TO
MARS

THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM

STONE SOUR
PARKWAY DRIVE
FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH
COAL CHAMBER
CANCER BATS - SACRED MOTHER TONGUE

limpbizkit

A DAY TO REMEMBER
AIRBOURNE - GHOST - RIVAL SONS
AMON AMARTH - MASTERS OF REALITY
GRAVEYARD - THE GHOST INSIDE
HELLYEAH - BLITZ KIDS

SPYTRICON

MODESTEP - P.O.D. - NEWSTED - RED FANG
VISION OF DISORDER - BLEED FROM WITHIN
HACKTIVIST - BRUTALITY WILL PREVAIL
LITTLE CAESAR - KROKODIL - STATES OF PANIC



SONIC BOOM SIX - GLAMOUR OF THE KILL - I AM I
BUFFALO SUMMER - HUNTRESS - BLACK DOGS
MORDECAI - THE FIRST - NAKED FLAME

PLUS MORE BANDS TO FOLLOW

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vodafone

max



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(BILL SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

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A SURGEON'S

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